

TAUNTON'S

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1995 NO. 11

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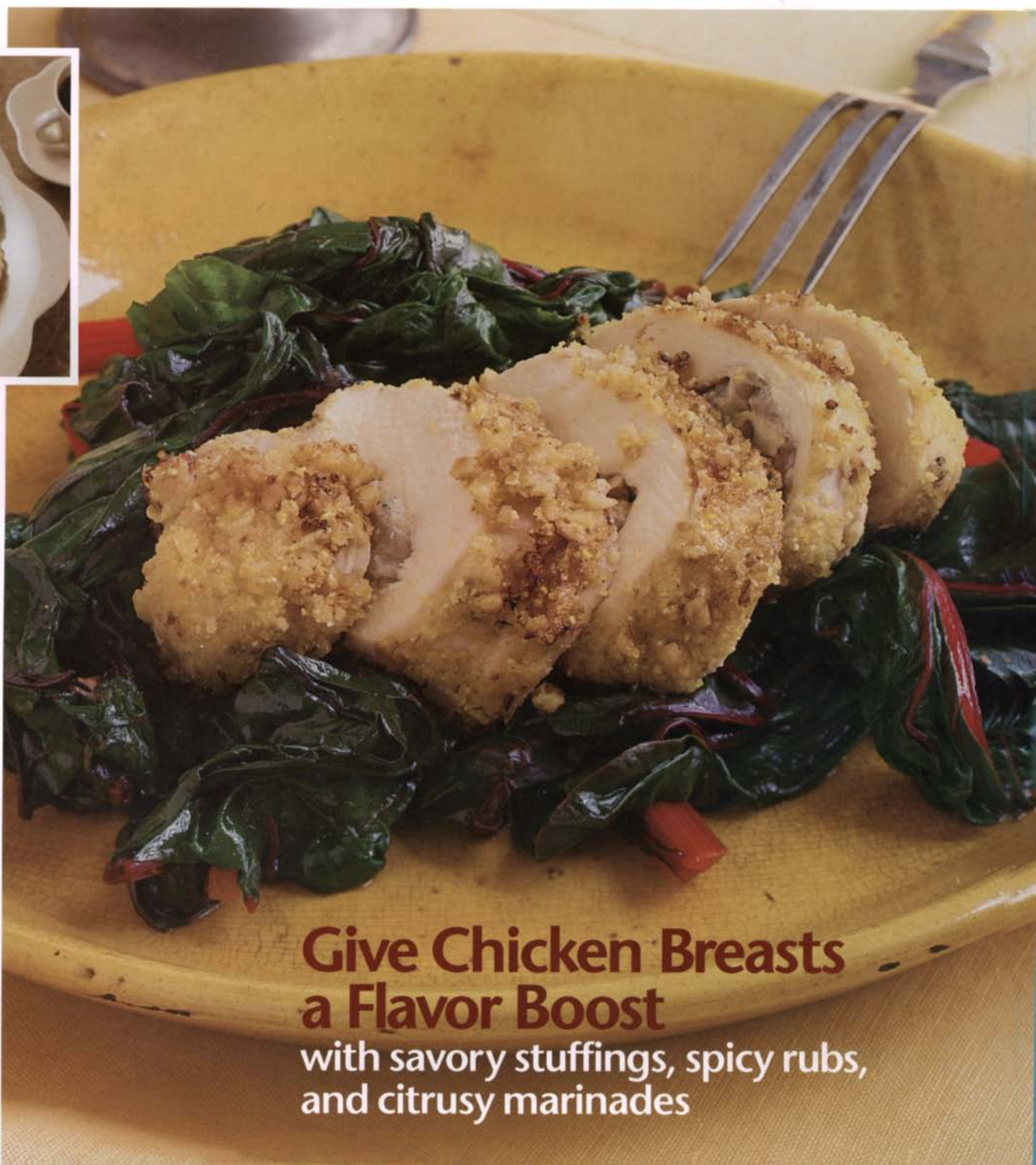
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OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1995 ISSUE 11

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Cover photo, Ellen Silverman; inset, Beth Galton.  
This page: top, Kathryn Kleinman; middle, Mark Thomas; bottom, Dennis Gottlieb.

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## A note for chocolate lovers: I revived my curdled ganache

Your contributor Ortrud Carstens doesn't offer much hope for curdled ganache when she says "I've never had much luck completely restoring curdled ganache." (*Fine Cooking* #2, p. 69). When this happened to me at the final stage of making the triple chocolate cake by Jean-Pierre Marquet (same issue, p. 68), I poured off the separated fat, put the chocolate into my food processor, and switched it on. I poured some heavy cream straight from the carton into the feed tube and *voilà!* In a few seconds, I had a beautiful, smooth, glossy, and pourable ganache. Beginner's luck? I would welcome a comment from Ortrud.

—J.J. Jackson,  
Victoria, BC

**Ortrud Carstens replies:** I'm pleased that your method for restoring your separated ganache cake filling proved successful. I wouldn't necessarily categorize your experience as beginner's luck, but in this case you may have been the beneficiary of the famous fickleness of ganache, an inherently unstable emulsion. I tried to duplicate your experience three times, but was never able to reach the point of separation where fat could be poured off, although it did curdle all three times due to my intentional mishandling. In trying to reconstitute the curdled ganache in the food processor, I was able to bring it reasonably well together on one occasion, but found that it curdled even more on the other two occasions.

By reason of the chemistry involved, ganaches, as emulsions, have always been considered fickle concoctions. Therefore, even following the steps generally recommended to make the ganache (*Fine Cooking* #2, pp. 66–69) will not guarantee success every time. The same applies for the steps generally recommended for reconstituting a curdled ganache.

Every cook, professional or amateur, must develop his own way of working the mixture and his own standard of acceptability (gloss, smoothness, degree of separation, etc.). I prefer to execute my ganaches totally by hand, not by food processor, in order to maximize my control of the work process. For me, the food processor puts too much brute force into my delicate mixture and mixes much too quickly, both (in my experience) likely culprits in separation. This loss of control does not allow me to make subtle but effective adjustments during the mixing process.

In the end, working with ganache is as much an art as a science. You should feel free and happy to use whatever procedures and standards work for you.

## Funds for culinary studies

First, I would like to commend you on a very fine magazine. It is professional in its approach, thorough in its food coverage, and concise enough so as not to be boring. We keep it in our school libraries at our two locations.

In *Fine Cooking* #9 (p. 10), there was a question about scholarships for culinary

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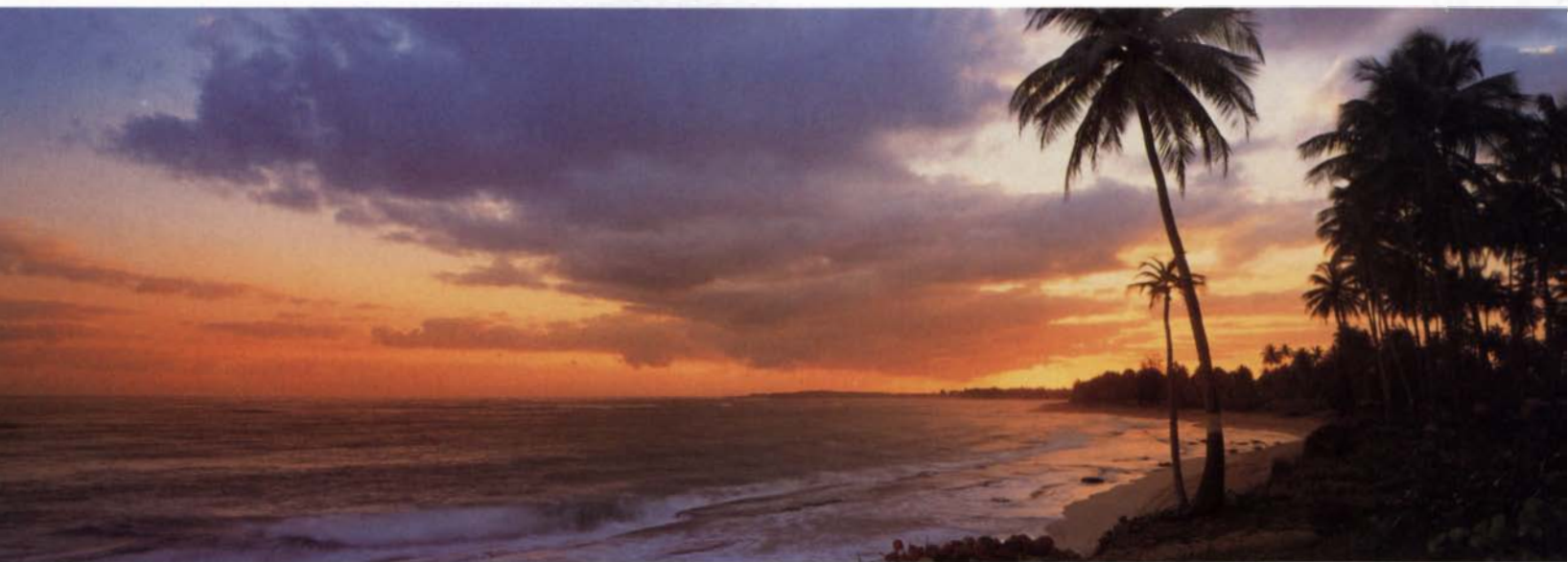
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study. You mentioned that the IACP sponsors scholarships. In actuality, it is the IACP Foundation that grants scholarships and sojourns. The IACP Foundation is under the umbrella of the IACP, but the 501(c) statuses are different. Our 501(c)(3) status permits us to give scholarships. Seventy to eighty scholarships and sojourns for 1996/97 will be awarded in April 1996.

The IACPF also produces annual research reports on food issues. The Foundation participates in hunger issues by providing services and money for children's programs that have an educational component.

The Foundation also has a Simone Beck Library Fund which disburses money to libraries that have a non-circulating culinary collection. Last year, the IACPF awarded more than \$12,000 to the Schlesinger Library to help offset the cost of refurbishing Simca's works.

Best wishes for continued success with your publication.

—Patrice W. Dionot,  
Administrative Director,  
L'Academie de Cuisine;  
Past Chairman & Trustee,  
IACPF,  
Bethesda, MD

**Editors' note:** For information on the International Association of Culinary Professionals and the Foundation, write to IACP, 304 West Liberty St., Suite 201, Louisville, KY 40202; or call 502/587-7953; or fax 502/589-3602.

## In defense of farmed salmon

I would like to rebut several items included in a letter comparing farmed and wild salmon, by Richard Gross of Sointula, British Columbia (*Fine Cooking* #8, p. 4).



His statement that farmed salmon are "unhealthy" is patently untrue. They are not fed antibiotics or "chemical feed throughout their life cycle," as Mr. Gross stated. Antibiotics are administered only to the six-inch smolt stage to ease stress and naturally occurring disease susceptibility as they are introduced from fresh water to saltwater. From that stage forward, for 18 to 24 months until [they reach] harvestable weight, the fish are fed an organic diet consisting of fish meal and vitamins.

Fish farms are located in deep, well-flushed areas that disperse waste. Less than 1% of salmon, once introduced to saltwater, fail to reach harvestable size. Fresh farmed salmon reach the marketplace as firm, bright, good-colored, excellent-flavored specimens that more and more retailers and restaurateurs ask for because they can't count on consistent quality in wild salmon.

—Pete Granger,  
Executive Director,  
Washington Farmed Salmon  
Commission,  
Bellingham, WA

## Better beans with the pressure cooker

I hate to correct a spokesperson for the Bean Education Awareness Network (BEAN), but I'd like to take issue with Allison Scherer's suggestion that the best way to cook dried beans is by using a preliminary hot soak, followed by boiling (*Fine Cooking* #7, p. 8).

Unquestionably, the best way to get tender beans in the shortest time is to cook them in the pressure cooker, following the instructions given by Lorna J. Sass in *Cooking Under Pressure* (William Morrow, 1989): cook 1 cup washed, unsoaked beans with 4 cups

water and 1 tablespoon oil (actually, ½ tablespoon oil for each additional cup of beans). Cooking times vary for each variety of bean; the book includes a chart.

This method produces the most uniformly tender beans I've ever eaten, using the shortest and most predictable cooking times—even for old beans—without soaking.

—Doris Taub,  
Chicago, IL

## This family loves heady, fruity Rumtopf

I enjoyed reading "May: Time to Start a Rumpot" in *Fine Cooking* #8 (p. 40). I have lived in Germany for the past ten years and have just returned to the United States. I enjoyed many customs of the German people and *Rumtopf*, the preserve of fresh fruit macerated in rum, was one of them. In the area where I lived (in the Taunus Mountains, north of Wiesbaden), the custom was to prepare *Rumtopf* throughout the summer, with pineapple as the last fruit to put into the crock.

It isn't until the first Sunday of Advent, when they light the first Advent candle, that the Germans serve *Rumtopf*. At that time, each family member has just a small glass of the liqueur to welcome in

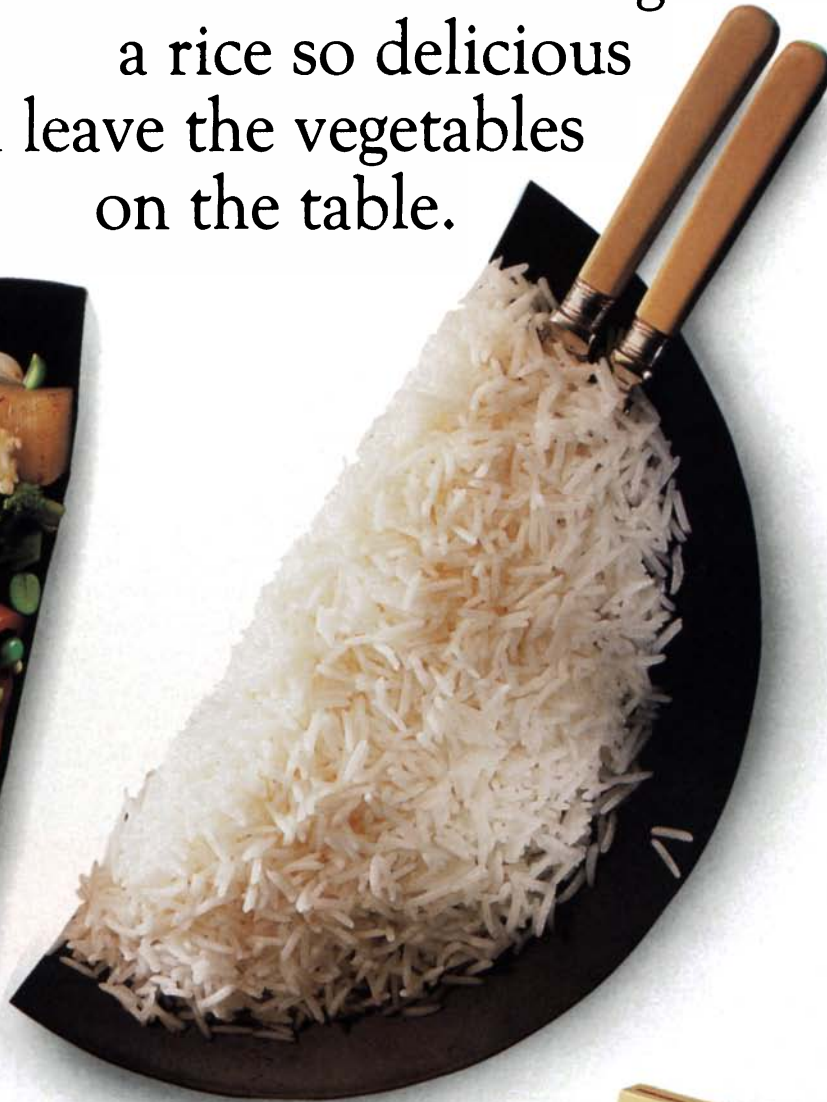
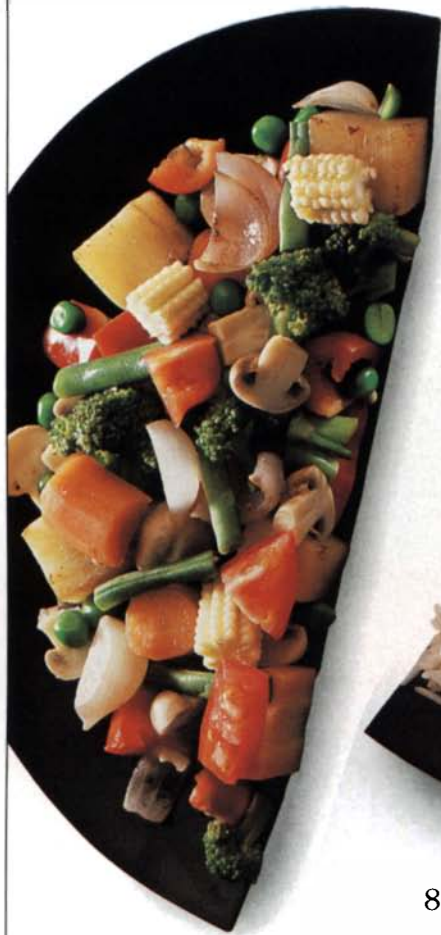
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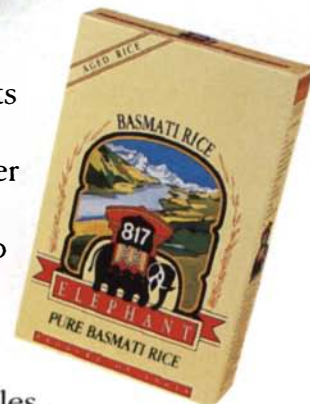
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## LETTERS

the Christmas season. After that, *Rumtopf* is served to visiting friends and relatives throughout the holidays as a cordial or, as was mentioned in the article, served over cake or with ice cream.

—Janet Masly,  
Saylorsburg, PA

### The name game with wild greens

I have recently discovered *Fine Cooking* and enjoy it. I do however have a captious comment about the article "Great Greens" in *Fine Cooking* #7 (p. 32). Author Steven Petusevsky says dandelion greens are also called cow parsnip.

I've never heard dandelion greens called cow parsnip, and indeed the two are entirely unrelated botanically. All the sources I

can find identify cow parsnip as *Heracleum lanatum*, a very large-growing member of the parsley family often found in wet areas. I don't have any knowledge that any part of this plant is edible. With leaves of six to ten inches across, shaped somewhat like a serrated maple leaf (sometimes more finely divided) and stalks rising as high as eight feet, this plant looks nothing like a dandelion.

I am concerned mostly because many people are allergic to other members of the *Heracleum* genus, and because a number of members of the parsley family (which look more like cow parsnip than dandelions ever could) are highly poisonous, including water hemlock.

Dandelions are dandelions anywhere, so I wouldn't

expect many people to be misled, if they'll only trust their first instinct as to what a dandelion is.

—Will Hutchison,  
Bakersfield, CA

**Editors' note:** John Kallas, Ph.D., an expert in uncultivated edible plants and the owner of Wild Food Adventures in Portland, Oregon, concurs with Mr. Hutchison's assertion that cow parsnip is in no way related to dandelion. But while neither Mr. Hutchison nor Dr. Kallas could find a source identifying cow parsnip as anything other than *Heracleum lanatum*, author Steven Petusevsky cites *The Complete Book of Fruits & Vegetables* (Crown) for its use of the name *Taraxacum officinale* in reference to both

cow parsnip and dandelion.

As for Mr. Hutchison's concern that someone might be harmed by eating *Heracleum lanatum* (true cow parsnip), Dr. Kallas says that the plant isn't harmful and does in fact have some food value. According to Dr. Kallas, the young leaf stalks may be peeled and eaten, and the lower stalk of the plant may be dried, ground, and substituted for salt.

### Errata

In the recipe for a variation of *sofrito* to use in bean dishes ("Contemporary Cuban Cooking," *Fine Cooking* #9, p. 52), a substitute ingredient was inadvertently omitted. The text should have read, "Add ¼ cup diced slab bacon or ⅓ cup ground or diced baked ham to the basic *sofrito*." ♦



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# AFTER CHOPS AND ROASTS

## Peachy Pork Picante

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Nutrient Information, Approximately, per Serving: Calories: 263, Protein: 24 gm., Fat: 9 gm., Sodium: 762 mg., Cholesterol: 70 mg.

Nutrient analysis done by The Food Processor II Diet Analysis Software. Pork data from USDA Handbook 8-10 (1991).



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# The Buttery, Sweet Pear

A sampling of autumn's favorite fruit, from the luscious Comice to the crisp Bosc

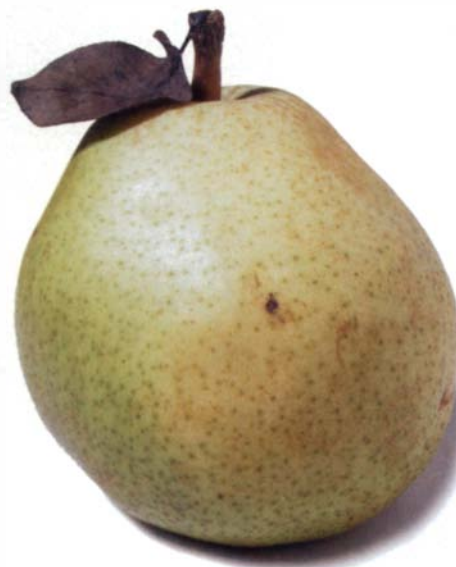
BY SALLY SMALL



**Bartlett and red Bartlett**  
*Bartletts, also called Williams, flourish early in the season, making these sweet and juicy pears a good choice for late-summer eating.*



**French Butter**  
*French Butter (or Beurré Hardy) is an early variety with tender skin and soft, fine-textured flesh.*



**Doyenné du Comice**  
*Comice pears range from green to mottled yellow-gold. The fine-grained flesh of this autumn pear makes it a good choice for cooking, provided that it's slightly underripe.*

**A**s a Sacramento Valley pear grower, I am embarrassed by how often people ask me, “Why can’t I find a ripe pear?” Part of the answer is seasonality. Pears are highly seasonal. Unfortunately, like their pome fruit cousins, the apples, they can be stored for long periods of time without any outward signs of aging. Long after their flavor has faded and their flesh has

turned to mush, a pear may still look fresh.

**Early pears are fragile.** The Bartlett or Williams pears arrive in markets in late July; a few precocious Italian varieties may precede the Bartletts by two weeks. Enjoy these until mid-September, and then begin to look for other varieties, such as the Beurré Hardy or French Butter pears. All these luscious,

soft-textured, early varieties are best eaten fresh. If you must cook them, poach them briefly (10 to 15 minutes) and very gently—a bare simmer.

**Autumn pears are firmer and more versatile.** In October come the dependable autumn pears, the firmer baking and poaching pears, the better storing pears. (In fact, some of the autumn varieties need to rest for nearly a

month in commercial cold storage to bring out their proper flavor.) The tiny, sugar-sweet Seckel, so good for preserving; the slender-necked Beurré Bosc and the Winter Nelis, both sturdy in texture and a joy to poach; the delicate, incomparable Doyenné du Comice; the Forelle and the d’Anjou—all are in the market from October to April, though their

**Forelle**

*Forelle pears usher in the autumn in early October. When perfectly ripe, these green- and red-dappled pears are perfumed and sweet.*

**D'Anjou and red d'Anjou**

*D'Anjou pears arrive in autumn. The yellow-green variety is thin-skinned and slightly grainy—good for cooking if not quite ripe.*

*Red d'Anjou is smaller and firmer.*

**Bosc**

*Bosc pears have a slender-necked shape and a matte finish to their mossy-fawn skin.*

*These autumn pears stay crisp and firm even when quite ripe.*

**Winter Nelis**

*Winter Nelis has sturdy flesh and globe-like shape, making this autumn pear good for poaching.*

**Seckel**

*Seckel is a tiny, green-to-rust autumn pear with a slightly thick skin and sweet, firm flesh—ideal for preserving.*



flavor begins to pale by early spring. In the spring and early summer, look for pears imported from South America.

Another reason for the paucity of ripe pears is that pears must be ripened off the tree. Experienced buyers can taste the “promise” of an unripened pear, but it’s a tricky business. Better to rely on a good produce person or a reputable local grower. Be

sure to give him feedback. Some growers pick their fruit before it matures in order to catch the high prices early in the season. This immature fruit lacks sugar. It looks fine, but it will taste woody when ripe, or it will shrivel and never ripen at all.

**Ripen pears yourself for tender, juicy flesh.** You will

have prettier fruit if you ripen your pears in your own kitchen. If they come

wrapped in a flat, leave them there; the less handling the better. Otherwise, wrap each pear in tissue or old newspaper and set it in a cardboard box or a brown paper bag—but not plastic. You are simply trying to increase the concentration of

ethylene gases that pears naturally emit without smothering the fruit. A cool (60° to 65°F), dark place is ideal. A pear should ripen slowly. When it yellows slightly and yields to the touch at the neck, you will have it: a ripe, juicy pear.

---

*Sally Small grows pears at the Pettigrew Fruit Company in Walnut Grove, California. ♦*



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### **Searing meat adds flavor but not juiciness**

*Does caramelizing the outer surface of a piece of meat seal in the juices? My chef at cooking school says searing the meat doesn't lock juices in, but my chef at work says differently.*

—Jackie Lachine,  
Chatham, Ontario

**Harold McGee responds:** Any cook would be delighted to have a foolproof method for making meats succulent. Unfortunately, searing isn't the answer.

For many centuries, meats were usually cooked through slowly and then given a quick browning at the last moment. In 1847, an eminent German chemist named Justus Liebig asserted that an initial dose of high heat seals the meat's surface with an impermeable layer of coagulated protein, thus allowing the meat to retain its juices. Cookbook writers uncritically embraced Liebig's theory, and a new tradition was born.

Kitchen myths die hard, especially when they're as appealing as searing. But you can easily demonstrate that Liebig's searing theory doesn't, well, hold water.

The next time you sear a steak or a chop, watch and listen carefully. When the meat hits hot metal, you hear it sizzle and see it steam. Sizzling is the sound of water being vaporized into steam as it hits the pan or grill, and the sizzling and steaming continue throughout the cooking. After a while, red juices well up through the seared surfaces. And when you transfer the meat to the cutting board, the

steam continues to rise as the juices puddle. Searing doesn't prevent any of these obvious signs of moisture loss.

In fact, searing doesn't even *reduce* moisture loss. In the 1930s, American home economists found that seared roasts lost more weight than roasts cooked at a constant temperature. In 1989, I performed similar experiments with lean, 1-inch steaks. Unseared steaks cooked to 140°F, or medium rare, lost 14% of their weight in moisture; seared steaks lost 18%. After cooling on a plate, the unseared steaks had lost 22%; the seared steaks, 25%.

Searing actually increases the loss of meat juices because it gets the outer layers of the meat very hot. The more heat you put on meat fibers, the more they contract, and the more moisture gets squeezed out of them. The only way you can minimize cooking losses is by minimizing the cooking. Rare meat is juicy; well-done meat is less so.

None of this means you should forswear searing meat, however. Searing speeds the browning of the meat's surfaces, which tremendously enriches its flavor.

*Harold McGee wrote the award-winning On Food & Cooking: The Science & Lore of the Kitchen (Scribner, 1984) and The Curious Cook (Collier, 1992).*

### **No more tears on meringue**

*How do you keep meringue from weeping? After I cover a meringue-topped pie, the meringue begins to weep and makes the crust damp.*

—Fred Muise,  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

The following reply was composed from two sources, **Carole Walter and Shirley O. Corriher**: To resolve the problem of weepy meringues, you have to define your terms. There are two kinds of excess liquid associated with meringues: the beads that appear on top of a meringue, and the liquid that oozes between the meringue and the pie filling. The beading on top is caused by overbaking, and the liquid that can form beneath a meringue is caused by underbaking. To further complicate matters, both can happen at the same time. If you put meringue on a cold filling and put the pie in a too-hot oven, the top will overbake while the meringue next to the filling won't be cooked long enough.

Since egg whites are mostly water, it's difficult to keep a meringue absolutely tear-free; however, there are a few things you can do to make weeping less likely.

♦ **Make a meringue that uses two parts granulated sugar to one part confectioners' sugar.** Confectioners' sugar contains cornstarch, which helps absorb the egg whites' moisture. Also, confectioner's sugar dissolves very quickly and gives the meringue a smooth texture.

♦ **Make the meringue before you make the filling;** the sugar will hold the meringue's volume while you make the filling. After you pour the hot filling into the pie crust, immediately top the filling with the meringue and put it in the oven. The heat from the filling will begin to cook the bottom of the meringue. This additional heat means you can slightly lower the oven temperature, if necessary, to

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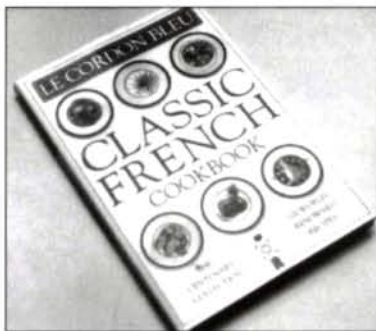
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prevent a beady meringue.

◆ **Sprinkle day-old cake crumbs between the filling and the meringue** as an alternative method for dealing with excess liquid collecting between the filling and meringue. This trick should give you a bone-dry sealed surface. *Carole Walter is the author of the award-winning cookbook Great Cakes (Ballantine Books, 1991). Shirley Corriher, a contributing editor for Fine Cooking, teaches food science.*

## Sauté the rice for better risotto

*Most recipes for risotto call for sautéing the rice in oil first. What does this do?*

—Alan Brown,  
North Hollywood, CA

**Suzette Gresham-Tognetti replies:** The classic risotto

technique calls for constantly stirring the rice while adding small amounts of simmering liquid, which produces firm grains bound by creaminess. This method encourages the rice to become creamy, but all that stirring can also break up the rice and make it mushy. The initial sautéing of the rice in hot oil “seals” the rice, giving it a protective coating. The oil’s protection doesn’t prevent the risotto from becoming creamy, however, because risottos are traditionally made with *arborio* rice. *Arborio* is thought to have an elevated level of amylopectin, or waxy starch molecules. This means *arborio* has more of the clingy and creamy properties that rice naturally possesses.

When you sauté the rice, make sure the grains don’t

color. This would cause the rice to seal and harden, which would hamper its ability to exude starch.

*Suzette Gresham-Tognetti is the chef and co-owner of Acquerello in San Francisco. She also teaches regional Italian cuisine at Draeger’s Culinary Center in Menlo Park, California.*

## The lowdown on litchis and pepino melons

*My local grocery store has begun to expand its produce line, and I’d like to try two of the fruits they now carry—litchis and pepino melons. I’m hesitant, however, because I don’t know how to judge their freshness or how to make the best use of them. Could you provide some guidance?*

—Agatha Meauxpre,  
Newtown, CT

**Debra Cohen replies:** Everyone wants fresh produce, but I think it’s particularly important to know how to judge exotic items since they tend to be expensive. One bad experience could make you think twice about taking a chance on an unknown fruit or vegetable.

When a pepino melon is ripe, you’ll know it; the small, teardrop-shaped melon becomes highly perfumed. In fact, the scent is stronger than its flavor, which is a mild cross between a cantaloupe and a honeydew. Look for pepinos with smooth, taut, shiny skin that’s creamy yellow and streaked with purple. It should give slightly to pressure. Eat pepinos raw as you would any melon. Unlike most melons, pepinos have only a few large seeds,

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and these are edible. The pepino's shape makes it a particularly attractive container for serving other fruits.

Litchis, which look like an oversized grape with a brittle, rough shell, are a rare sighting at any grocery; they're available for two to four weeks out of the year (generally in July and August). If you find them, make sure that they're pink or red in color; if they're dark, they're old. Litchis should be whole and free of juice on the prickly outer shell, which cracks easily between thumb and finger. The fruit within is sweet, pearly white, and has the texture of a peeled grape. Litchis can't be devoured with the ease of grapes, however; each one contains a long, shiny, brown seed, but it's easy to remove. A bowl of

litchis are a good way to end a meal; they're also a good addition to fruit salad—perhaps one served in a pepino melon.

*Debra Cohen is the director of marketing and product development for Melissa's by Mail, a mail-order source for exotic produce and spices that's based in Los Angeles.*

### Preventing tough crusts on sourdough

*I have a sourdough starter with a delicious flavor, but it produces a loaf with a very tough crust. I live at an altitude of 7,000 feet. Could that be a factor?*

—Toni Cherry,

San Miguel de Allende,  
Mexico

**Betsy Oppenneer replies:** Altitude definitely has an

effect on many aspects of baking, but tough crusts have two common causes that are not related to altitude. First, if you don't keep your starter healthy and active, it tends to make tough dough. I feed mine in the morning and in the evening of the day before I plan to bake. An active, bubbly starter makes the bread lighter, and it won't form as much crust.

The second thing to consider is how you cover your dough while it's rising after it has been shaped. If you use a towel, for example, use a tightly woven one or air will get through to the dough, which will also make the crust tough.

Living at 7,000 feet, however, can present baking problems. Sourdough breads baked at 2,000 feet or above

rise faster and higher than those baked closer to sea level. If you're using yeast with your starter, try cutting back on the amount you use. If you don't use yeast, try adding about half a teaspoon of baking soda to your dough for every six cups of flour in your recipe. (The baking soda will help control fermentation and cut back on the bread's rising; when bread rises too much, it can affect the crust.)

Finally, the most common mistake in baking bread is adding too much flour, which can give you a tough crust no matter where you live.

*Betsy Oppenneer owns Escapades, a bakery and specialty food store in Roswell, Georgia. She's the author of The Bread Book (HarperCollins, 1994) and has produced two videos on bread baking.* ♦

## Apple Squares from KCJ

Preheat Oven to 350°

(1 cup walnuts to sprinkle on top before baking)

2 cups all purpose flour

1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder or baking soda (either will work)

1/2 teaspoon salt (optional)

1 teaspoon cinnamon powder

In a large bowl, stir well all of the above dry ingredients *except walnuts* and put aside.

In another large bowl add:

4 cups Granny Smith or other tart apples (peeled and sliced)

2 cups sugar

2 unbeaten eggs

3/4 cup vegetable oil

1 1/2 teaspoons KCJ Tahitian Vanilla 2x

1 1/2 teaspoons KCJ natural butter extract

Stir sugar into apples. Quickly stir in unbeaten eggs. Stir in oil and extracts.

Immediately add apple mixture to flour mixture, stir in or fold gently until flour is completely incorporated. Don't overmix. Pour into greased 9"x13" pan; spread batter evenly over bottom of pan. Sprinkle walnuts on top. Bake for 45-50 minutes until top is golden brown. Allow to cool completely and cut into squares.

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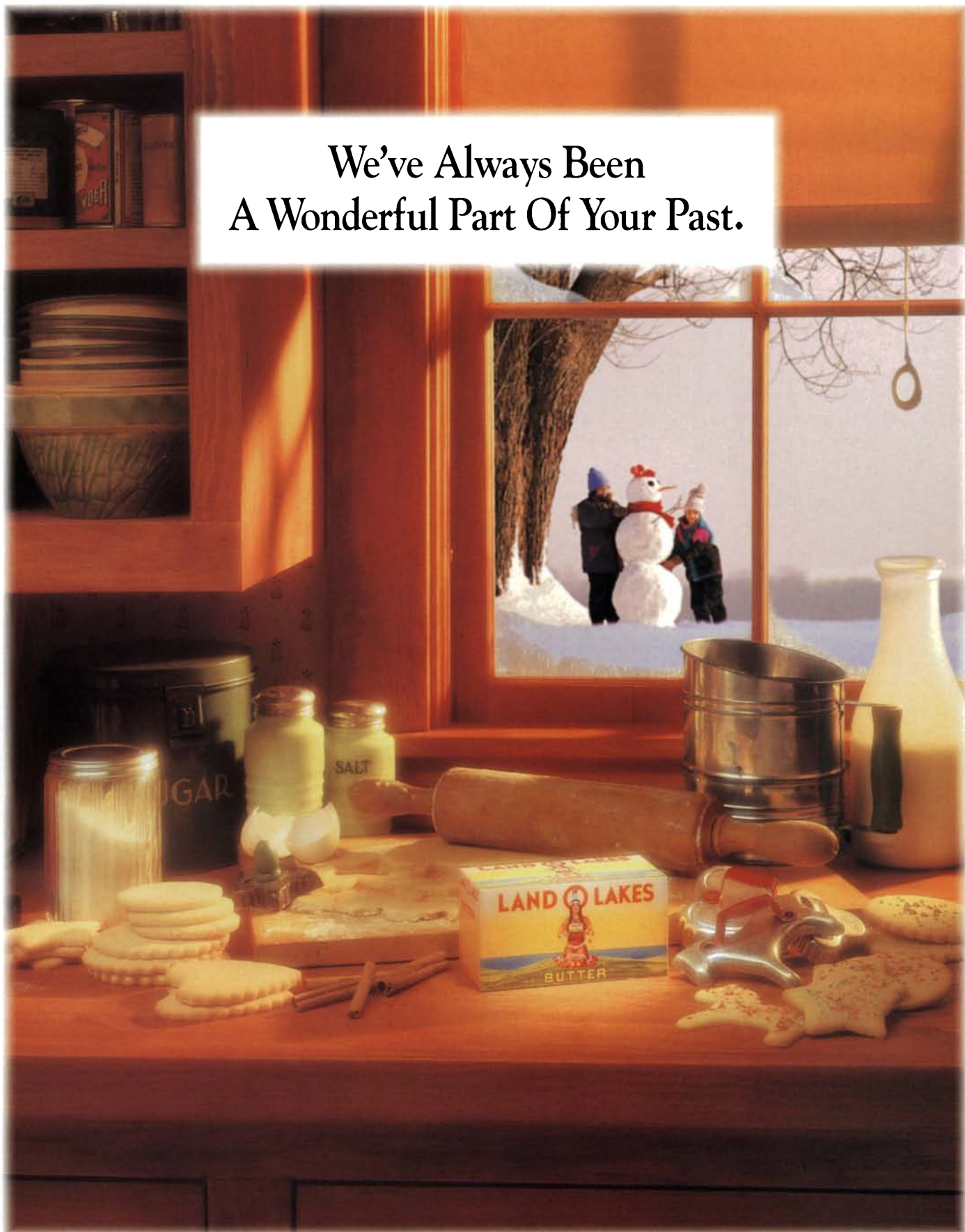
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## Today's pressure cookers work quickly—and safely



If your memories of pressure cookers are anything like mine, what you remember most is not the amazing speed with which they cook food, nor the intense flavors that result. What you probably remember is the noise and the worry. The noise came from the jiggle-top regulators that all the older models had. The worry came from the constant, if exaggerated, threat of explosion. But thanks to a new generation of pressure cookers that are sleek, quiet, and virtually explosion-proof, cooking under pressure is making a comeback.

To test the new cookers, I bought a 5-quart model made by the Swiss company Kuhn-Rikon. This model, the Duro-matic, has been hailed as the Mercedes-Benz of pressure cookers—quiet, quick to come up to pressure, and easily opened and closed—and has a suggested retail price of \$149.

*Release the steam safely and easily with a touch of button.*

(There are about 20 brands on the market, ranging in size from 2 to 10 quarts and in price from \$30 to \$230.)

Although jiggle-top versions are still being made, most of the newer models have stationary pressure regulators, which make them quieter as well as safer. And all the new models have safety features, such as a lid that must be locked into place before the pressure can rise and an expandable rubber gasket that makes it impossible to remove the lid until all pressure has been released.

**The appliances themselves have changed somewhat, but the principle behind cooking under pressure has not.** Food and liquid are sealed in the cooker, which looks like an ordinary pot with a fancy lid that locks into

place. When the pot is heated on the stove, the steam produced by the boiling liquid causes pressure to build inside. Under this pressure, the temperature of the steam—usually a few degrees above 212°F—increases to 250°, which cooks the food more quickly than conventional steaming. More important, the trapped steam conducts heat better than air does. The steam aggressively penetrates the food, quickly breaks down its fibers, and gives it an intense flavor. Dishes that usually simmer for hours can be ready in a fraction of the time.

**Adapting recipes to the pressure cooker takes some trial and error.** I quickly learned that, unless I was following a recipe written for a pressure cooker, determining the proper cooking time and amount of liquid takes some practice, especially since you can't see or touch the food when the lid is locked on.

for my beef stew (it kept coming out too watery and bland), I turned to the guide that came with my model. Using its suggested ratios, I found the correct amount of liquid to use.

**Foods that normally need long cooking work best under pressure.** Once I got it right, my stew tasted great. The cubes of meat (a leaner top round worked better than my usual chuck) held together and were fork-tender and as rich as conventionally cooked chuck meat.

I'd always been told that beans and the pressure cooker were a match made in heaven. Indeed, black bean chili was wonderful: buttery smooth and intensely rich after 15 minutes of high pressure. My favorite bean stew, *leb lebi*, a Mediterranean chickpea-based stew, was tender and flavorful after just 30 minutes, quite a feat considering chickpeas usually take anywhere from two to five hours to cook.

**To my surprise, pressure-cooked risotto was great, just as velvety and creamy as conventionally cooked risotto.**

In general, cooking times are reduced by one-third. When determining cooking times, pressure-cooker guru and cookbook author Lorna Sass suggests erring on the side of undercooking because you can always bring the food back up to pressure or finish cooking it on the stovetop.

Fortunately, most cookers come with information on how to adapt recipes for cooking under pressure. After struggling with the liquid amount

Vegetables met with moderate success in the pressure cooker. Artichokes, rutabagas, whole potatoes, cauliflower, and beets cooked quickly and evenly under pressure. But I'd save the more delicate peas and squash for the steamer or the microwave.

**Stocks cooked in 10 to 20 minutes with rich results.** Unfortunately, the size of my cooker meant that I could only make about 6 cups per batch. (You need to leave room for

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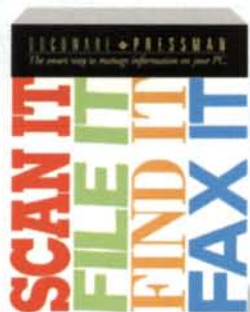
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pressure to build.) If you plan to make large batches, either buy the biggest pressure cooker you can find or stick to your stockpot.

**To my surprise, pressure-cooked risotto was great.** A time-consuming rice dish that can be tricky to cook well—constant stirring, slowly ladling in broth until you reach the desired consistency—was ready in only 6 minutes in the pressure cooker. Following a recipe designed for a pressure cooker, I sautéed some onion in the cooker with the lid off. After briefly sautéing the rice as well, I added all the chicken stock at once, locked the lid on, and heated the cooker to high pressure. After 6 minutes, I relieved the pressure



*Creamy risotto, without all the stirring, is ready in about 10 minutes using the pressure cooker.*

and gave the rice a stir. Had it been undercooked, I could have added a bit more stock and continued cooking it uncovered on the stovetop.

Skeptical of my first trial results (beginner's luck?), I have continued to make a variety of risottos with unwavering success. Tasters, including my family and the *Fine Cooking* staff, all agreed that the pressure-cooked risotto was just as velvety and creamy as risotto conventionally cooked.

**Some recipes just don't work in a pressure cooker.** Although I was pleased with

risotto, polenta under pressure came out like pasty, lumpy cornmeal mush, despite varying its cooking times and the amount of liquid used. I had hoped steamed Boston brown bread would turn out a winner, but I was disappointed. Not only did I find it awkward to maneuver the baking dish in and out of the cooker (especially since it was boiling hot!), but I also had trouble getting the bread to cook evenly. The inside was delicious and moist, but large sections of the exterior remained runny and wet.

**Three options for relieving the pressure.** The natural release, removing the cooker from the heat and allowing the pressure to reduce naturally, supposedly helps food retain more flavor. I found this method too time-consuming—5 to 20 minutes, depending on how much pressure has built up—for what little benefit I found.

The quick-release method, tilting the pot under cool running water while the steam escapes, is faster and is the preferred method for foods like risotto and tender vegetables for which it's important to halt the cooking. But I found trying to hold and tilt the hot cooker cumbersome and dangerous.

I prefer a third method of release. Using a long-handled spatula or spoon, I simply depress the valve release button. The steam comes out quickly and safely.

Pressure cookers aren't necessarily cheap, but they can be a wise investment for the time-crunched cook. For more information on the Kuhn-Rikon Duromatic, including retail sources, call 800/662-5882.

*Abigail Johnson Dodge is a recipe consultant and food stylist based in Southport, Connecticut. She is Fine Cooking's recipe tester.*

## Roasted macadamia nut oil: flavorful, versatile, and healthful

As a cook who's partial to oils with prominent flavors, I was happy to try Loriva's new roasted macadamia nut oil. I was even happier with the results.

For a first taste, I simply splashed the oil on some bread. It had a pronounced, roasted, macadamia flavor. Curious to see how the oil compared to other nut oils, I tasted it along with some walnut oil for contrast. The macadamia oil came charging through with a nutty flavor quite distinguishable from the walnut oil.

Macadamia nut oil has a very high emollient factor; a simple vinaigrette made with the oil tasted good and also coated my greens well.

**This oil adds a wonderful, toasty quality to stir-fries, corn, even carrot cake.**

Macadamia oil also has a high smoking point (389°F), so I decided to stir-fry some green beans with whole garlic cloves. It added a wonderful, toasty quality, especially to the garlic cloves. I tried seasoning corn on the cob with the oil, salt, and pepper and roasting the

ears until lightly browned. This simple treatment made the flavor of the corn more complex.

When I baked a carrot cake substituting the ¼ cup of vegetable oil called for with macadamia nut oil, I was rewarded with a roasted flavor that gave the cake added dimension of flavor. I plan to use the oil in the cake again, perhaps adding some chopped macadamia nuts as well.

In many of these tests, I also tried a nonroasted macadamia oil. This other oil, made by a different company, had practically no flavor. So unless you're concerned solely with the health benefits of using macadamia oil—it's even higher than canola and olive oil in monounsaturated ("good") fats—don't bother with the unroasted kind.

If I had to choose between types of nut oils, I'd probably go for the roasted macadamia oil over a walnut oil because it's a bit more versatile. The Loriva roasted macadamia nut oil costs about \$6 for 8 ounces and is available in supermarkets nationwide.

For more information, or to order Loriva oils, call 800/945-6748.

*Jean Galton is a food writer and recipe developer in Seattle. ♦*



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*Deglazing's dramatic moment—hear the sizzle, see the steam, and smell that wonderful aroma.*

# Deglazing— making sauce from the sauté pan

A process so easy, with results so satisfying, that it quickly becomes second nature

BY JAMES PETERSON

**W**hen I teach French cooking classes, I make elaborate French sauces, but unless I'm trying to impress someone, I rarely make these sauces at home. My own easier (but still delicious) approach to making a savory sauce begins by deglazing the pan in which I sautéed meat, poultry, or fish.

Deglazing means adding liquid to a sauté or roasting pan (after the meat, poultry, or fish has been removed) to dissolve the juices that have caramelized and stuck to the bottom of the pan. These browned bits are intensely flavorful and are the basis for a range of easy sauces.

## MAKING A DEGLAZED SAUCE



**1** *Degrease the pan.* These ugly brown bits left in the pan give the sauce beautiful flavor. When the meat is removed, you should be left with caramelized juices stuck to the bottom of the pan and a layer of liquid fat. Remove the pan from the heat (so the brown bits don't burn) and pour off the fat.



**2** *Sauté shallots briefly in the still-hot pan to give the sauce some sharpness. Use a wooden spoon to start scraping up all those good browned bits that are stuck to the bottom of the pan.*



**3** *Add the liquid and stir.* A generous splash of wine or other liquid dissolves the caramelized juices, capturing the flavor of the food. Simmer the liquid until it's reduced by half. At this stage, you can simply spoon the sauce over the cooked meat, or add other ingredients for a more complex flavor.

## CORRECT SAUTÉING IS THE FIRST STEP

When meat is sautéed, it releases juices. Cooked correctly, these juices will caramelize and attach themselves to the bottom of the pan.

**Get your pan and your fat hot.** To sauté properly, make sure both your pan surface and whatever fat you've added is hot. Otherwise, the surface of your meat or fish won't brown, meaning the savory crust necessary for both the food and the pan won't form. The pan must not be too hot, however, or the juices will burn, making the sauce bitter.

**Use a pan that fits your ingredients.** The pan must also hold the food without crowding. If it's too small, any pieces of meat not in contact with the pan will release juices that don't get caramelized, causing the food to steam. If the pan is too large, the surface not covered by the meat will overheat and the juices will burn.

Judging how well the juices are caramelizing is easier with

a pan that has a silver surface rather than a black one. Don't use a nonstick pan, since it's designed specifically to prevent the accumulation of browned juices. Before deglazing, remove the meat, poultry, or fish.

## USE A FLAVORFUL LIQUID TO DEGLAZE

I prefer to deglaze with wine (usually about a half a cup from the bottle I'm serving with dinner), but you can also use good stock, vinegar, cider, or even beer. The deglazing liquid, combined with the dissolved browned bits and reduced, makes a great sauce just as it is. I use this simple sauce to coat the ingredient with a shiny and savory glaze.

**You can make the sauce even tastier by adding concentrated stock,** that is, homemade stock that has been reduced to intensify its flavor. If you don't have any homemade stock, there are good concentrated commercial products—usually called

*demi-glace* or *glace de viande* (meat glaze)—that make a good, quick sauce.

**Variations on the deglazed sauce are virtually limitless,** but there are a few touches that can elevate your sauce from very good to excellent. I often stir finely chopped shallots into the still-hot pan for about 30 seconds before adding the first liquid to give the sauce a little sharpness. To help bind the sauce, I'll swirl in about a tablespoon of butter before serving. I also like to add finely chopped parsley or other herbs at the very last minute to give the sauce color and to freshen its flavor. Finally, to add a note of mystery and to wake up the sauce's flavor, stir a few drops of a good wine vinegar or cognac into the pan at the last minute and cook for about 30 seconds.

**The same techniques can be applied to deglazing a roasting pan.** But unlike sauces made from sautéed meats, sauces for roasts are best kept simple. If you have a

lot of juice in the roasting pan, such as from a roasted turkey, the roasting pan has in a sense deglazed itself, and your sauce, or *jus*, is delicious on its own. Pour the liquid from the pan into another container and skim off the fat with a ladle.

If you have a small amount of juice, such as from a roasted chicken, set the roasting pan on the stove and boil down the juices until they reduce to the point where bits have caramelized to the bottom of the pan. Pour off the fat floating on top or skim it with a ladle. You're now ready to deglaze the roasting pan, but use water instead of wine so that nothing conflicts with the pure taste of the meat or poultry.

---

*James Peterson teaches French cooking around the country. His book, *Sauces* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991), was named Cookbook of the Year by the James Beard Foundation. His new book, *Fish & Shellfish*, will be published this year. ♦*



**4** *Extend the sauce with rich stock.* Concentrated broth adds depth of flavor to the sauce. You may need to thicken the sauce by simmering it until it's reduced. If it seems too thick, add a tablespoon or so of water.



**5** *Add a little butter to enrich the sauce.* Though the sauce is fine without it, many cooks swirl in a little unsalted butter just before serving, which adds flavor and thickens the liquid. You can also bind the sauce with cream, cornstarch, a little fresh cheese, or a vegetable purée.



**6** *Season the sauce.* Always taste for salt and pepper. Just before serving, add fresh herbs and vinegar or cognac to add color and punch up the sauce's flavor.



Do you have a clever way to peel vegetables, line a cake pan, or keep herbs tasting fresh? Write to *Tips, Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506; or send your tip by e-mail: America Online: finecooking; CompuServe: 74602,2651. We pay for tips we publish.

## Blend away lumps in sauces and pastry cream

No matter how careful you are, sometimes your pastry cream or béchamel sauce gets lumps. Should you throw it out and start over, or just panic? Neither. Simply put the lumpy custard or sauce in a blender or food processor fitted with a steel blade and blend the mixture for a few seconds until it becomes smooth and satiny.

Sometimes the custard or sauce will soften and thin a bit, but reheating it will restore the thicker consistency. Be sure to whisk constantly when you're reheating and keep the heat low, or it's back to the blender.

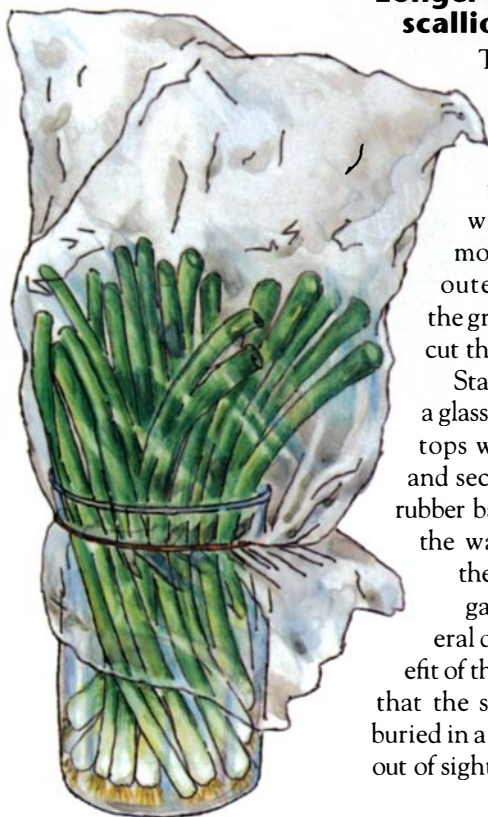
—Lyn Nelson-Joseph,  
Houston, TX

## Longer-lasting scallions

To prevent scallions from quickly withering in your refrigerator, store them in a glass of water. Simply remove any discolored outer layers and trim the green tops, but don't cut the roots.

Stand the scallions in a glass of water, cover the tops with a plastic bag, and secure the bag with a rubber band. If you change the water occasionally, the scallions will stay garden-fresh for several days. Another benefit of this storage system is that the scallions won't be buried in a produce drawer—out of sight, out of mind.

—Russ Shumaker,  
Richmond, VA



## Spoons that stay put

I know it's a bad habit, but I love to leave my wooden spoon resting on the edge of a sauté pan as my sauce simmers away. The real problem is that, as the sauce reduces, the spoon often slides down into the pan when I'm not looking. Then I have to fish it out and wash it off.



To keep my spoons from sliding into the saucepan, I've cut a small notch in each just about where they naturally rest on the pan's edge.

—Gloria Gerstein,  
New York, NY

## Blanch basil for greener pesto

At the end of the summer, when my basil plants are just about growing out of control, I like to make large batches of pesto—both to eat immediately and to freeze for the winter. But no matter how I grind the basil—in a food processor, by hand, or with a large mortar and pestle—the basil always turns an unattractive dark green, almost black.

I solved this problem by quickly blanching the basil in boiling water. I put all the cleaned, picked leaves in a large colander and pour boiling water over them. The quick blanching turns the basil a lively green that stands up to the food processor. While the basil does lose some of its garden-fresh aroma, the flavor is still wonderful and the color is brilliant.

—Margaret Kasten,  
Norwalk, CT

## Refresh your spices in the sun

In my cooking, a fusion of French and Indian cuisine, I use lots of spices. Periodically, I refresh their flavor in the following way: I pour the spice out of its jar and onto a clean plate and set the plate in a sunny spot, like a windowsill. The heat from the sun will draw out the spice's flavor.

Meanwhile, wash the spice jar, preferably in the dishwasher, to get rid of any stale odors. When the spice jar is bone-dry, simply pour the spice back into it.

—Raji Jallepalli,  
Restaurant Raji,  
Memphis, TN

## An old trick for smoother polenta

While living in Italy, I learned an age-old trick for making lump-free polenta. When your water is rapidly boiling, take a plum-sized piece of stale, hard bread—preferably from a dense European-style loaf—and stir it into the water with a wire whisk until it's completely broken up. Then add your cornmeal.

—Nicole Lavezzi,  
Sacramento, CA

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½ lemon, juiced  
1 teaspoon cayenne  
1 tablespoon fresh cilantro, chopped  
1-15 oz. can EDEN Diced Tomatoes with Green Chilies, drained  
3 green onions, chopped

Blend first 7 ingredients in a food processor or blender until smooth. Fold in tomatoes and green onions.

Variation: ½ cup chopped sweet pepper or red onion can be added to this delicious spread or dip.

Serve with pita bread, crackers, raw vegetables, or chips.



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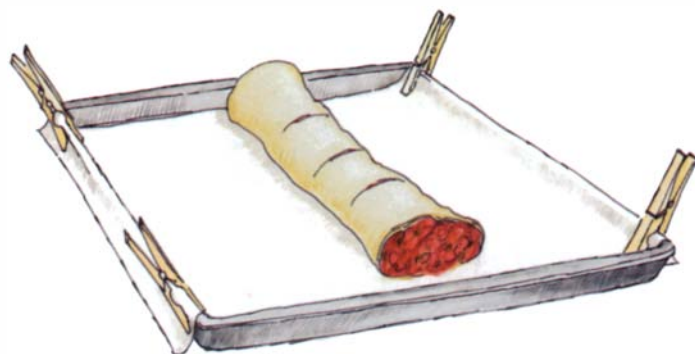


## Pinning down parchment

I was interested in Eric Hoey's tip about anchoring baker's parchment to the pan so it doesn't slide out of place as you're working (*Fine Cooking* #8). All of us who like to use parchment must have had this problem with it and have coped with it in various ways. I like to clip the parchment to the rim of the baking sheet

with a common spring-loaded clothespin at each corner. As soon as the item to be baked is safely on the baking sheet, whether it be a batch of cookies or a couple of loaves of hearth-baked bread, the item itself will hold the paper down, and the clothespins can be removed before putting the batch in the oven.

—James Hunter,  
Traverse City, MI



## Getting a grip on chicken skin

I like to remove the skin from chicken before I cook it, but it can be a tough job—after a few tugs, my hand is too slippery to grasp the skin. I've found that holding the chicken skin with a paper towel gives me a better grip, and that I'm able to remove the skin with ease.

—Daniel Chmielowski,  
Juneau, AK

## Another method for cutting onions without tears

I found the tips on dealing with onions in your recent issues interesting, but for many people there's a much easier way than running water over the onion or wearing goggles. If you have a stove

with a downdraft vent and a reasonably portable cutting board, simply move your cutting board as close to the vent as possible, turn it on, and then chop, dice, or mince as you please with nary a tear. Of course, such a procedure with an overhead vent will produce disastrous results.

—Randolph Siverson,  
El Macero, CA

## Freezing bacon

Since the days of eating bacon at every breakfast have passed, it's difficult to keep bacon on hand. Yet its value as a flavoring is unequaled, and I often find that I need a slice or two to add to a soup or sauce recipe. The solution? Frozen bacon, which you can quickly and easily defrost.

(Continued on p. 28)

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2-14.5 oz. cans EDEN Diced Tomatoes  
1-2 teaspoons salt to taste  
1 tablespoon fresh ginger (optional)

Place squash in saucepan with EDENSOY®. Simmer until squash is soft. Add 1 can of diced tomatoes and puree with squash. Add second can of diced tomatoes, leaving in chunks. Heat, add salt, ginger and serve. Garnish with croutons and green onions. Delicious and easy!

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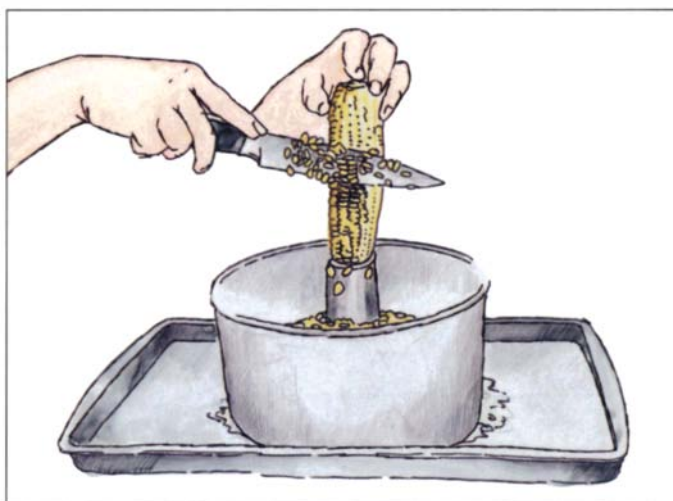
Start with a pound of bacon. Place two or three strips on a narrow sheet of plastic wrap. Fold the wrap over to seal, and then roll into a little ball. Put several of these bacon packets inside a plastic freezer container for safe, fresh storage.

Defrost a couple of these bacon packets, and with eggs, parsley, and linguini or fettuccine, you can have a no-time-to-cook dinner—pasta carbonara.

—Linda Cornwell,  
Wyncote, PA

## Quick corn kernels

I do a lot of freezing and canning. Corn relish is my favorite recipe, so I was motivated to find an efficient system of getting the kernels off of the cob.



Set an angel food cake pan in a large, shallow baking pan. As you shuck the corn, gently drop each ear into boiling water for a quick blanching. Set a blanched ear on the center stem of the cake pan, narrow end down,

so that the cob fits into the stem. Use a sharp knife to slice down the ear, removing the kernels. The kernels will fall safely into the cake pan, while the milk will seep through the seams of the cake pan and stay contained

in the shallow pan. Turn the corn as you work, and before you know it, you'll be ready for the next ear. This method is faster, neater, and safer than placing the corn on a cutting board and balancing it with one hand and cutting with the other.

—Joel C. Patterson,  
Mt. Vernon, OH

## Cleaning pasta machines

I have found that the most effective tool for quickly cleaning a stainless-steel pasta machine is a one-inch brush. The bristles can get into the little crevices where flour likes to hide. I set the machine on the widest setting available to clean the rollers.

—Carla Brownlee,  
Ottawa, Ontario ♦

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- ½ cup maple syrup
- 2 cups flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1-2 tablespoons lemon zest
- 1 cup raisins

Mix wet ingredients, set aside. Sift dry ingredients. Combine together adding raisins last. Spoon batter into greased or paper lined muffin pan. Bake at 375° for 15-18 minutes. Yield: 12 muffins



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# Give Chicken Breasts a Flavor Boost

Try a spicy Jamaican rub, a citrusy marinade,  
or a jalapeño-spiked stuffing

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

**T**he beauty of a boneless, skinless chicken breast is not immediately apparent. Cooked without adornment, it tastes—well, it doesn't taste like much. What makes chicken breast exciting is that unlike, say, lamb or beef, it pairs well with a wide range of ingredients, from the mellow mushroom to the hot habaño, and it readily absorbs the flavors of its seasonings. This, along with chicken breast's other benefits—it's quick to prepare and low in fat—makes it an amazingly versatile ingredient. In fact, I make chicken three times a week, but because chicken, and chicken breast especially, is so adaptable, my dinners never seem boring.

Such versatility is also due to the many ways chicken breast can be prepared. Flattened and rolled around a filling, chicken breast makes an elegant entrée. Sliced into thin strips, it's perfect for stir-fries or fajitas. Chunks of chicken breast can soak up the juices of a stew or be grilled on skewers.

Unfortunately, some cooks treat the skinless, boneless breast with little respect, sacrificing flavor by underseasoning it and overcooking it. To get moist, mouthwatering chicken breast, you have to start with good chicken, give it a flavor boost, then cook it carefully to keep it tender and juicy.

**For the best flavor, buy the best chicken.** Today there's a wide variety of chicken at the grocery store.

Free-range and free-roaming chickens are usually minimally processed and not frozen for shipping, so they're firm and flavorful. Often these kinds of birds are sold regionally; in Connecticut, where I live, I buy Bell & Evan's brand. Ask your butcher to recommend a fresh chicken that's available in your area. Though the national brands are widely available and assure uniform size and taste, these birds are often treated with preservatives and frozen, which I think makes them bland and kind of wooly.

Regardless of the bird you buy, it should be even-colored. Chicken breasts range in color from deep yellow to pinkish white, depending on what the bird ate and what kind of life it led. The color itself isn't as important as its consistency. Look for breasts with a uniform color and no bruises. Breasts should also look moist, not dried out, which can signify age.

**Prepping boneless, skinless chicken breasts is quick work.** I buy chicken breasts already boned and skinned to save time on preparation. Sometimes the breasts are whole, meaning there's two halves attached by yellow cartilage; often they're already separated. Many recipes call for cooking the halves separately, with one half equal to one portion. Before you start any recipe, you'll need to do a few quick maneuvers.

Chicken breast readily  
absorbs the flavors of its  
seasonings, from  
fragrant curry spices to  
the hot habaño.



## MAKING A POCKET



*The perfect spot for stuffing. Make a slit on the thick side of the breast.*



*Spoon in the filling and press the edges together.*

- ◆ Give the breasts a quick rinse under cold water and pat them dry with paper towels.
- ◆ Separate the breast halves, if necessary, by cutting through the meat just to the side of but close to the tough, yellowish cartilage that holds them together. Throw the cartilage away.
- ◆ Trim the remaining fat on the breast (there's usually very little) with a sharp knife.
- ◆ Remove the tenderloin, that thin piece of meat barely attached to the breast, or leave it attached, as you prefer. I try to keep the breast intact; after all, the tenderloin is the tenderest part of the chicken. But if it's uncooperative and fails to stay put, simply remove it, pop it into a freezer bag, and freeze it for later use. (I save them until I have enough to use in stir-fry.)

When you're ready to use the tenderloin, remove the white tendon that runs through the center. Grab the larger white end (if it's slippery, use a paper towel to get a better grip) and gently slide a sharp knife down the tendon to scrape away the flesh.

**Flattened breasts cook more evenly.** Though you can cook them as they are, flattening the breasts, even slightly, makes them more attractive and allows them to cook more evenly. I put the breasts between two sheets of plastic wrap and pound them with a small, flat-bottomed skillet; a mallet or a rolling pin also works well. Pound a little to thin the thicker end; pound more to make the breast uniformly thin for rolling. When cutting strips, chunks, and medallions, flatten the breasts slightly and freeze for about 15 minutes to make them firmer, less slippery, and easier to slice.

**Seasoning is crucial because chicken breast is so mild.** At the very least, the chicken needs salt and pepper. Whenever you cook chicken breast, use at least ¼ teaspoon of salt and a few good turns on the pepper mill to properly season each breast.

Aside from the crucial salt and pepper, there are many flavorings and seasonings that the breast can absorb through marinades, rubs, and coatings (see sidebar below). Flavored this way, a chicken breast can hold its own. For example, chicken coated in bread crumbs and sautéed makes a nice, easy dinner when teamed with rice pilaf and spinach. A breast that's been treated to a spicy rub like the Three-Pepper Rub (recipe below right) and grilled becomes a lively sandwich when paired with pita bread and a little lemon-flavored mayonnaise. Chicken kebabs marinated and basted with the Curry-Yogurt Marinade (recipe below) taste right at home served over basmati rice.

**Cook chicken breast any number of ways—just don't overcook it.** Sautéing and grilling are my favorite ways to prepare breasts because they're quick cooking methods and they don't allow the chicken time to dry out. You also get the benefit of the full flavor that comes from searing. Steaming and poaching keep breasts moist, but they don't add much flavor or color.

Regardless of the method, it's important not to overcook chicken breasts. Because cooking times vary depending on thickness of the breast and on the method, I use cooking times only as a guide, relying on sight and touch to really tell me when the chicken is done. Take the chicken off the heat as soon as it feels firm to the touch and its juices run clear, not pink, when the meat is pierced.

## Add extra flavor to chicken breasts



*Oil, herbs, spices, and nuts flavor the chicken breasts and keep them moist.*

## Marinades for moistness and tang

Marinating adds flavor and moisture by submerging the breasts in a seasoned liquid. Oil, milk, yogurt—even fruit juices—are good vehicles for transferring flavor. When making a marinade, use just enough liquid to keep the chicken wet. Prick the chicken's flesh before marinating it so the flavors can easily penetrate. You can use the marinade to baste the breasts

while cooking and to make a sauce. (Be sure to boil the marinade if you serve it as a sauce to kill any salmonella bacteria.)

Combine the ingredients in the following recipes in a nonreactive dish or in a zip-top plastic bag. Turn the breasts during marinating to distribute the flavors evenly. For best results, marinate the breasts for four to six hours in the refriger-

ator. You can get by with less time, but that means less flavor. (Recipes are for two whole breasts.)

### Ginger-Citrus Marinade

⅓ cup canola oil  
2 scallions, sliced thin  
¼ cup fresh orange juice  
1 lemon, sliced thin  
2 Tbs. honey  
2-inch piece ginger, sliced thin  
Grated zest of 1 lime  
½ tsp. salt  
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

### Curry-Yogurt Marinade

1 cup plain yogurt  
3 Tbs. fresh lemon juice  
1 large clove garlic, minced  
2 scallions, sliced thin  
½ cup cilantro, chopped coarse  
1½ tsp. ground coriander  
¾ tsp. ground cumin  
½ tsp. ground ginger  
¼ tsp. ground allspice  
¼ tsp. ground turmeric  
1 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes  
1 tsp. salt  
½ tsp. pepper



## Southwestern Chicken in Parchment

Serve the chicken sealed in its package with garnishes on the side. *Serves four.*

4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves (about 6 oz. each)  
4 oz. mild goat cheese, room temperature  
2 medium jalapeños, minced (about 1 Tbs.), or more to taste  
3 sun-dried tomatoes, minced (about 2 Tbs.)  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
2 cups cooked black beans  
1 small red onion, chopped fine (about ½ cup)  
3 Tbs. olive oil  
⅓ cup chopped fresh cilantro  
1 tsp. ground cumin  
1 tsp. red-wine vinegar  
Pinch cayenne  
Paprika for decoration  
Lime wedges  
Kitchen parchment or aluminum foil

Lay the chicken breast halves on a work surface with the smoother side up. With a sharp knife, make an incision about 3 inches long and 2 inches deep in the middle of the thick side of the breast to create a pocket (see photos at left).

In a small bowl, combine the goat cheese, jalapeño, and sun-dried tomatoes. Spoon a quarter of the filling into each pocket. Press the edges to seal. Generously season the breasts with salt and pepper. Refrigerate for 15 min.

Meanwhile, combine the beans, onion, olive oil, 3 Tbs. of the cilantro, the cumin, vinegar, cayenne, and more salt and pepper to taste.

Heat the oven to 375°F. Cut the parchment into four 15-inch squares and crease each in half on the diagonal. Spoon about ½ cup of the black bean mixture on one side of each parchment square; top each with a chicken breast and sprinkle with paprika. Fold the free triangle over the chicken to cover. Fold both edges of the parchment together all the way around the paper to seal



*A tantalizing package of Southwestern-spiced chicken and black beans. Some jalapeño-spiked goat cheese stuffing peeks out of the pocket of this chicken breast baked in parchment.*

## Rubs for a spicy kick

A dry marinade, or spice rub, uses very little liquid and lots of spices or herbs to create a thick paste to smear on the breasts. A spice rub imparts intense flavor in a short time, and it helps keep moisture in by giving the chicken a slight crust.

Combine the ingredients and then smear the rub on the chicken. I put everything in a zip-top plastic bag and use it

to massage the dry marinade onto the breasts. Spice rubs need a little less time than wet marinades to do their work—2 to 4 hours should do. (Recipes are for two whole breasts.)

### Jamaican Spice Rub

3 scallions, minced  
1 clove garlic, minced  
¼ tsp. ground nutmeg  
1 Tbs. ground allspice  
½ tsp. ground cinnamon

1 small jalapeño, minced  
1 Tbs. white-wine vinegar  
3 Tbs. olive oil  
¾ tsp. salt  
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

### Three-Pepper Rub

3 Tbs. olive oil  
3 Tbs. grated lemon zest  
1 Tbs. lemon juice  
1 small hot chile pepper, minced  
1 Tbs. coarsely ground black pepper  
Pinch cayenne  
1 tsp. salt

## Coatings for crunch

Breadcrumbs are perhaps the most common coating, but chopped nuts, herbs, hard cheeses, cornmeal, or any combination of these work well. To bind the coating, dip the chicken in a liquid, such as melted butter, beaten eggs, or milk, before dredging it in the coating. Refrigerate the coated chicken for 20 minutes before cooking to help the

coating adhere. Coated breasts are best sautéed. (Recipes are for two whole breasts.)

### Cornmeal Nut Coating

FOR THE BINDER:  
¾ cup buttermilk  
1 large egg  
1 Tbs. vegetable oil

FOR THE COATING:  
1 cup finely chopped nuts (pecans, walnuts, pistachios)  
1 cup cornmeal  
1 tsp. salt  
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

### Parmesan Breadcrumb Coating

FOR THE BINDER:  
⅓ cup Dijon mustard  
2 Tbs. white wine  
1 Tbs. olive oil

FOR THE COATING:  
1 cup fresh breadcrumbs  
1 cup grated Parmesan cheese  
2 Tbs. freshly chopped herbs, such as thyme, rosemary, parsley, chives, or a combination  
½ tsp. salt  
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper



## MAKING A ROULADE



Roll flattened breasts around a filling using plastic wrap to lift.



Secure the roll by threading a toothpick through the seam.



Dip the roll in melted butter or other liquid to bind the coating.



Dredge the breasts in the coating, using your fingers to press it on.

tightly. Put the packets on two baking sheets and bake until the packets are lightly browned and puffed, about 25 min. Serve immediately with the remaining cilantro and the limes.

## Gorgonzola-Stuffed Roulades

Refrigerating these rolled breasts after they've been coated helps the crust adhere while they cook. *Serves four.*

**4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves (about 6 oz. each)**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

### FOR THE FILLING:

**3 Tbs. olive oil**  
**3 medium yellow onions, sliced thin**  
**½ cup crumbled Gorgonzola cheese (about 2½ oz.)**  
**⅓ cup toasted chopped walnuts**

### FOR THE COATING:

**½ cup finely chopped walnuts**  
**½ cup cornmeal**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**5 Tbs. unsalted butter**  
**1 Tbs. olive oil**

**For the filling:** In a heavy, medium-sized frying pan, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the onions, reduce the heat to low, and cook until the onions are caramelized and very soft, about 25 min. Transfer the onions to a bowl. When cooled, add the Gorgonzola and walnuts. Set the mixture aside or refrigerate for up to 24 hours.

Lay each chicken breast, with the smoother side down, on a sheet of plastic wrap and cover with a second sheet. Flatten the breasts evenly to ¼ inch. Remove the top sheet of plastic and generously salt and pepper the breasts.

Spread a quarter of the filling onto each breast to within ½ inch of the edges. Using the bottom sheet of plastic wrap to help lift the breast, fold about ½ inch of each long side onto the filling. Press down firmly. Again using the wrap as a guide, roll the breasts starting with the narrow end. Keep the folded edges tucked in; secure with a toothpick. Place each roulade, seam side down, on a plate and refrigerate while you prepare the coating.

**For the coating:** Combine the walnuts, cornmeal, and salt and pepper to taste on a plate or shallow dish. Melt 3 Tbs. butter. Roll each roulade in the melted butter to cover completely and then immediately roll it in the cornmeal mixture to cover, pressing in the coating with your hands. Refrigerate the roulades at least 20 min. before cooking.

In a medium frying pan, heat the olive oil and the remaining 2 Tbs. butter over medium heat until the butter foams. Add the roulades, seam side down, and cook over medium heat, turning them every few minutes. Cook until the crust is well browned and the chicken feels firm when pressed, about 15 to 18 min.

## Chicken & Sweet Pepper Stew

You can make this dish without the sour cream. If so, reduce the paprika to 1 tablespoon. *Serves four.*

**4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves (about 6 oz. each), trimmed and cut into 2-inch chunks**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**3 Tbs. olive oil**  
**20 pearl onions, peeled, or 1 large onion, chopped coarse**  
**8 small sweet red mini-peppers, stemmed and seeded, or 1 large red bell pepper, chopped coarse**

**1 large garlic clove, minced**  
**1 Tbs. plus 2 tsp. sweet Hungarian paprika**  
**One 28-oz. can whole plum tomatoes, drained (½ cup juice reserved), squeezed dry, and chopped (about 1 cup)**  
**¼ tsp. cayenne**  
**½ cup white wine**  
**1 bay leaf**  
**2 fresh branches thyme**  
**⅔ cup sour cream**  
**1 Tbs. flour**  
**¼ cup chopped fresh parsley**

Season the chicken generously with salt and pepper. In a large, heavy pot, heat 2 Tbs. olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the chicken and cook until well browned on all sides. Remove the chicken and keep warm. In the same pot, heat the remaining 1 Tbs. oil and add the onions and peppers. Cook, stirring often, over medium-low heat until the peppers soften and the onions are easily pierced with a knife, about 15 min. Add the garlic and cook a few more minutes. Add the paprika and stir until the onions and peppers are well coated and the paprika is fragrant.

Add the tomatoes and cayenne and stir until well blended and slightly dry, about 2 min. Add the tomato juice, the chicken (with any accumulated juices), the white wine, bay leaf, and thyme. Bring to a boil, stirring up any browned pieces stuck to the bottom. Reduce the heat to medium and simmer until the sauce reduces slightly and the chicken is cooked through, about 10 min.

In a small bowl, combine the sour cream and flour until smooth. Add this to the stew, stirring just until well blended. Bring the stew to a boil and cook for 2 min. longer. Just before serving, add the parsley.

*Abigail Johnson Dodge is a recipe consultant and food stylist in Southport, Connecticut. She's also Fine Cooking's recipe tester. And she's probably having chicken for dinner tonight. ♦*



Chicken & Sweet Pepper Stew pairs with tender egg noodles.



Truly “wild” (natural) rice looks and tastes different than its cultivated cousin. Clockwise from top: cultivated wild rice; natural wild rice that was processed over an open fire; mechanically processed natural wild rice.

# Wild Rice is Nutty, Earthy, and Bold

Try this native American grain in salads, stews, pilafs, and even waffles

BY JUDY MONROE

Maybe it's because I'm from Minnesota, but I love wild rice. I eat it for breakfast, with a splash of milk and a drizzle of maple syrup, or even folded into waffle batter. I also eat wild rice in salads, stews, or with other grains in a pilaf. Its delicious flavor may be distinctive, but wild rice is very versatile.

## NATURAL VS. CULTIVATED—YOU DECIDE

Wild rice grows in several other states and in Canada, but whether based on prejudice or fact, I think wild rice from Minnesota has is superior. Most wild rice isn't actually grown in the wild; it's cultivated in man-made paddies. There is a true wild rice, however, called “natural,” which is harvested by hand from the shallow waters around northern lakes (see sidebar on p. 36). Natural wild rice is mostly sold in specialty stores or by mail-order (see sources on p. 37).

While I enjoy cultivated wild rice and cook with it often, I prefer the natural rice. The differences between two are noticeable both by sight and by taste. The cultivated grains are very dark brown and black, and the flavor is quite assertive. Natural wild rice displays a range of earthy colors, from dark brown to tan to light green. The grains taste cleaner and lighter.

**A choice of quality.** Minnesota has labeling laws for wild rice, with packages stating if the grains are home-grown and natural or cultivated. Natural rice isn't graded by size or quality, but cultivated rice is generally classified by producers in one of these categories:

- ♦ **giant, or long-grain.** This top grade is the most expensive. Much of the supply goes to restaurants, but you may find it in specialty food stores. At least an inch long, the grains are even, shiny, and unbroken.

- ♦ **fancy, or medium-grain.** Although these grains are a bit shorter than the giant, they're even in length, uniform in color, and unbroken. This grade is readily available at supermarkets.

- ♦ **select, or short-grain.** Use these uneven, broken, and short grains in baked goods and soups.

**Expensive, but a good value.** Even in Minnesota, where wild rice is the official state grain, it can be costly, with prices averaging around \$5 a pound. But the cost per serving is only a few cents because wild rice expands more than some regular rice, tripling or even quadrupling in volume when cooked; one cup can serve six to eight people. And wild rice has an impressive nutritional profile. High in protein, carbohydrates, fiber, minerals, and three B vitamins, it's also low in fat.

## IT'S EASY TO COOK, BUT A BIT UNPREDICTABLE

Wild rice is simple to prepare, but the cooking times and amount of liquid will vary depending on the rice itself. Here are a few basic techniques that will give you the best results.

**Rinsing removes debris but not nutrients.** I don't rinse cultivated wild rice before cooking,





*Harvesting natural wild rice the traditional way means long, hot hours of poling through the rice paddies and knocking the grain into a canoe.*

## “Wild” rice: sometimes it’s wild, sometimes it’s not

Wild rice isn’t actually rice at all, but is the kernel of an aquatic wild grass. The annual plant, which has been gathered by Native Americans for more than 2,500 years, still grows wild in shallow, muddy waters in northern Minnesota and to a much smaller degree in northern Wisconsin and Michigan and in southern Canada. Wild rice (*Zizania aquatica*) is also cultivated in these regions, as well as in northern California.

### **Harvesting and processing.**

Most natural wild rice is hand-harvested, which requires many long, hard, sweaty hours. To harvest, two people work together in a narrow ricing canoe, one steering through

the long grasses, and the other gently tapping ripe grains into the canoe with a slender stick. A good ricer can collect more than 3,000 pounds of wild rice in one day. Cultivated wild rice, grown in man-made flooded paddies, is harvested by large combines, making it less expensive than the natural grain.

Cultivated wild rice is cured by a process that ripens the green kernels and changes the taste of the grain somewhat. Natural wild rice doesn’t get this step, more from tradition than for any technical reason.

All cultivated and natural wild rice is parched or roasted, which removes moisture from the grain, deepens the color, and develops the flavor. Some processors and Native Americans still hand-parch natural wild rice by pouring it into metal containers over open wood fires and stirring constantly. This process adds a subtle, smoky taste. Most processors, however, parch their wild rice mechanically.

unless it’s coated with a lot of wild rice “dust” (rice that’s been ground up by processing), but I do rinse natural wild rice to get rid of bits of hull. If you do rinse, don’t be worried about losing nutrients; they’re inside the grain, not on the surface. Rinse the rice in a strainer, or put the rice in a bowl and cover the grains with cold water, changing the water until it’s clear.

**Simmering works well, but you’ll need to watch carefully.** I think the best technique is to simply simmer the rice in water (or stock for more flavor) until done. A rough rule of thumb is one part rice to three parts liquid. Since different batches of rice absorb liquid differently, you may need to add a little more liquid during cooking, or to drain off any

**Don’t rely on your timer  
to tell you when wild rice is  
done. Taste a few kernels.**

excess liquid after the rice is done. The range of cooking times for cultivated rice is 40 to 60 minutes (covering the pan will speed things up); natural rice cooks quickly, in only 15 to 25 minutes.

**Get the timing right by tasting.** Don’t rely on your timer to tell you when the wild rice is done. Taste a few kernels: they should be chewy, not hard. Some people like very chewy rice and cook it until the grains are just breaking open along the seam and just a little of the creamy interior shows. Others prefer a softer texture and opt for a longer cooking time, producing grains with more of the light interior showing and many curled grains. Some grains may cook a bit unevenly; that’s just the nature of wild rice. Whatever you do, don’t overcook it: the grains will become mushy and lose their flavor and color.

**Season after cooking.** I gently mix in salt when the rice is cooked after I’ve drained off any remaining liquid. Since I never know how much liquid will be left after cooking, it’s easier to get the seasoning right once the rice is completely cooked.

**Storing wild rice.** Store uncooked wild rice in an airtight container away from heat and light. Because it’s low in moisture and fat, raw wild rice will keep for two to three years. Cooked wild rice will keep up to five days in the refrigerator. It’s fairly sturdy and not starchy, so it reheats well in a microwave or in a saucepan with a little liquid. Freezing cooked wild rice changes its texture, so I don’t recommend it.

### **VERSATILE WILD RICE CAN PLAY MANY DELICIOUS ROLES**

The chewy texture and nutty flavor of wild rice are welcome in many different types of foods. I use



it in main dishes, side dishes, salads, stuffings, quick breads and yeast breads, and desserts.

♦ **In salads.** Toss cooked wild rice with chopped fresh vegetables and a vinaigrette made with mellow sherry vinegar and walnut oil. Make it a main dish by topping with slices of grilled chicken or beef.

♦ **In soups.** To thicken soups and stews, add the uncooked grains and simmer for about an hour while the soup or stew cooks. Since wild rice swells a lot, you won't need to add much.

♦ **In grain dishes.** Perk up grain dishes by adding wild rice. It blends well with white and brown rice, wheat, barley, and corn. For fuller flavor, substitute chicken or beef stock for water when cooking wild rice.

♦ **With poultry.** Wild rice's earthy flavor and chewy texture make it a great stuffing for roasted poultry, especially small birds such as Cornish game hens or quail. Season the rice with lots of sautéed shallots and herbs like thyme, oregano, savory, sage, or rosemary.

♦ **With mushrooms.** Wild rice and mushrooms are a natural pairing. A favorite simple side dish is wild rice mixed with butter-sautéed mushrooms, scallions, and a pinch of thyme.

♦ **As a snack.** Fry wild rice in oil as you would popcorn.

#### SOURCES FOR NATURAL WILD RICE

*Cultivated wild rice is easy to find in grocery stores. For the natural grain, try these mail-order sources.*

Coteau Connoisseur Wild Rice, 218 West Warren, Dept. O.R., Luverne, MN 56156 (no telephone orders).

*Hand-parched natural wild rice.*

Manitok Wild Rice, Box 97, Callaway, MN 56521; 800/726-1863. *Natural wild rice.*

Judy Monroe is a food and health writer in St. Paul, Minnesota, with three cookbooks and many nationally published articles to her credit. She does some of her best work when munching on wild-rice "popcorn." ♦



*This chowder is what you want on a crisp fall evening—smoked chicken and wild rice make it hearty, root vegetables give it body and sweetness, and a hint of jalapeño adds spark.*

### Wild Rice & Smoked Chicken Chowder

Chef Kevin Cullen likes to experiment with the flavor and texture of wild rice in the dishes he serves at his Minneapolis restaurant, Goodfellow's. Here are the delicious results of one of his culinary experiments. *Yields about 8 cups.*

2 parsnips (about 8 oz. total), peeled and chopped coarse  
1 baking potato (about 8 oz.), peeled and chopped coarse  
1 onion, chopped  
2 cloves garlic, chopped  
2 small jalapeños, cored, seeded, and chopped  
4 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock  
3 Tbs. butter  
½ cup diced celery

½ cup diced bell peppers (mix colors if possible); more for garnish  
¾ cup diced sweet potato  
¾ cup corn kernels  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
½ cup milk  
1½ cups cooked wild rice; more for garnish  
1 cup (about 5 oz.) diced smoked chicken  
Worcestershire sauce to taste

Put the parsnips, potato, onion, garlic, and jalapeños in a large saucepan with the stock, bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer until the vegetables are extremely soft, about 30 min.

Cool slightly and then purée in a blender or food processor until smooth. Rinse out the saucepan. (If the soup base seems fibrous, strain it through a fine sieve.)

While the soup base is cooking, heat the butter in a large frying pan, add the celery, bell peppers, sweet potato, and corn and sauté over medium-high heat until soft and slightly browned, about 10 min. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Put the soup base in the clean saucepan, add the milk, and bring it back to a simmer. Add

the cooked wild rice, smoked chicken, and sautéed vegetables. Season with a little more salt to taste and a splash of Worcestershire sauce. Simmer a few minutes to give the flavors a chance to blend. Serve hot, garnished with a small heap of wild rice and diced peppers.

—Kevin Cullen, a native Minnesotan, spent much of his early culinary career cooking in Texas, including a stint at the Mansion on Turtle Creek. He returned to Minneapolis in 1987 to join the staff of Goodfellow's; he was named executive chef in 1992.





# Discover Celery's Warm Side

Cooking this familiar vegetable brings out its sweet, subtle flavor and fragrance

BY ERICA DE MANE



To most Americans, celery equals crunch. Whether we chop it for tuna salad or stuff it with Roquefort, we almost always eat celery raw. But try cooking it, as Europeans have done for ages, and you'll open up a whole new perspective on those green stalks patiently waiting in your fridge.

Cooking celery brings out its sweet side, a quality absent in the grassy bite of raw celery. In Europe, celery is braised, sautéed, puréed, baked, and fried. You won't see it steamed or boiled, however, because these methods render it almost tasteless.

## FROM SAUCES TO MAIN DISHES, CELERY IS SERVED HOT

Celery plays a supporting role in *mirepoix*, the aromatic vegetable base used in French sauces and stews (the Italian version is *soffritto*), but it also stars in many French and Italian dishes. Braising celery is the classic way to cook it. The French braise celery's inner ribs in butter and stock until tender. Celery braised in white wine and finished with lemon juice, a Provençal treatment, is wonderful with roasted chicken or baked fish. A northern Italian dish calls for coating the braised ribs with béchamel sauce, topping that with Parmesan, and baking until the cheese is hot and bubbling. Italians also enjoy the pure flavor of pasta



*Sautéed celery brings an intense, aromatic flavor to this easy pasta dish.*

Photos: Gerd & Hyers



*Celery's peppery flavor adds punch to a potato purée. Though often served as a sauce on its own, puréed celery makes a great side dish when paired with potato.*



*Celery root multiplies the celery flavor of this simple, soothing soup.*

dressed with sautéed celery and a little onion or garlic. They also use it in versions of *pasta e fagioli*, pasta and bean soup.

Cooked, puréed celery makes a lovely sauce for poached chicken or fish. To make celery purée, simmer chopped celery with a little chicken stock and a little butter until the celery is tender. Let it cool slightly and purée it in a food processor. (If the purée is thin and watery, return it to the heat and simmer until thickened.) Mixing celery purée with mashed potatoes gives it a more substantial texture, better suited for a delicious side dish.

#### **CHOOSE THE BEST CELERY AND KEEP IT FRESH**

No matter how you cook your celery, you want to start with a good, fresh bunch. At most supermarkets, your choice in celery variety is limited to the ubiquitous Pascal, grown mainly in California and Florida and available year-round. A cultivated form of wild celery, it is grown for its sturdy green stalks, or ribs. The other paler, more delicate varieties are a rare sight in the United States, though you may find them at gourmet or farmers' markets. Northern European varieties have a golden tinge and, say some chefs, are less watery than the celery here.

Avoid buying celery that's wrapped in plastic. There isn't necessarily anything wrong with it, but the plastic makes it difficult to feel and smell the celery. The ribs should be firm and bright green. Don't buy celery past its prime. If the ribs are rubbery, or the leaves are yellow or brown, the celery won't have much flavor.

Despite its sturdy appearance, celery doesn't keep very long, even when refrigerated.

### **Celery braised with white wine and lemon juice, a Provençal treatment, is wonderful with roasted chicken.**

erated; it can become soft after just three or four days. To keep celery fresh, wrap it loosely in a plastic bag and keep it in the vegetable crisper.

#### **PULL OFF TOUGH RIBS TO GET TO THE TENDER HEART**

Most older recipes call for blanching celery with a little flour or baking soda added to the water to keep the vegetable

green. But this step isn't necessary unless you're more worried about how the celery looks than how it tastes; blanching lessens celery's flavor, and it won't keep it green indefinitely.

**To prepare celery for cooking**, pull away the outermost ribs. These are usually too tough to be made completely tender (use them to flavor soups or stocks). Once you get to the heart of the celery—the tender, inner ribs—you may still need to peel away some of the fibrous strings on the outer ribs of the heart, which is easily done with a vegetable peeler.

In Europe, braised celery is often presented with the hearts left attached to the root base, which you can trim back for a neater appearance. Clean the hearts well under running water to remove trapped dirt from the root ends. Dry the hearts by standing them on end on paper towels and letting the water drain out of the ribs. Cleaning celery is even easier if you separate the ribs; simply rinse the individual ribs under running water.

**To chop or mince the ribs**, cut them into manageable sections. Slice these sections lengthwise to the desired thinness. Use one hand to hold the strips of celery in line and the other to chop across the grain into the desired size.





*Celery hearts look elegant when served intact. You can trim the roots, but leave enough to keep the ribs attached.*

The following recipes illustrate how the French and Italians like to cook celery. Try them, and you'll see that there's more to celery than crunch.

### Braised Celery with Tomato & Pancetta

You can leave the celery hearts whole, which makes for a rather fancy presentation, or you can discard the roots, cut the ribs into short pieces, and braise them that way. *Serves four.*

**4 bunches celery (about 1¾ lb. each)**  
**1 Tbs. olive oil**  
**¼ lb. pancetta, chopped fine**  
**1 large onion, chopped fine**  
**2 bay leaves**  
**1 cup Italian plum tomatoes (about 6 chopped) and their juice**  
**1 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock**  
**¼ tsp. salt**  
**1¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**

Pull off the tough outer celery ribs; reserve for another use. Trim the tops and bottoms of the remaining ribs, leaving the hearts about 6 inches long. Rinse the celery well and dry it. Reserve a handful of celery leaves for garnish. (Keep them fresh in a moist paper towel.)

Heat the olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat. Sauté the pancetta until it just starts to brown. Add the onion and sauté until soft, about 5 min. Add the celery hearts, bay leaves, tomatoes, and stock. Season with salt and pepper. Cover, reduce heat, and braise, turning the celery several times, until the hearts are tender (they should be easily pierced with a knife), about 45 to 50 min.



*Washed celery drains easily with a little help from gravity. Even if your celery comes washed, give it a rinse to remove dirt trapped in the root end.*

Remove the celery hearts from the pan, letting excess broth drip back into the pan, and transfer them to a serving platter. Simmer the braising liquid over medium heat until it thickens, about 10 min. Pour the reduced braising liquid over the celery and garnish with the reserved celery leaves.

### Tubettini with Celery Sauce

Cut the celery the same size as the pasta to give the dish a uniform look. Tomato or red pepper makes a delicious addition, but the version here is pure celery. *Serves four to six.*

**2 bunches celery (about 1¾ lb. each)**  
**⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil or to taste**  
**4 scallions, white and green parts, sliced thin**  
**2 cloves garlic, minced**  
**1 lb. tubettini or other small pasta**  
**3 Tbs. chopped flat-leaf parsley**



*Peel away the fibrous strings—they won't become tender with cooking. A vegetable peeler does the job nicely.*

**½ tsp. dried red pepper flakes or to taste**  
**¾ tsp. salt**  
**¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**

Remove the tough outer celery ribs and reserve for another use. Rinse the hearts well and dry them. Chop the celery leaves and wrap them in a moist paper towel. Chop the inner ribs approximately the same size as the pasta (see photo on p. 38.) You should have about 3¾ cups chopped celery.

Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan over medium heat. Sauté the scallions and celery until tender but still firm, about 10 min. Stir in the garlic and cook until fragrant, 1 or 2 min. longer. Remove from the pan and keep warm.

In a large pot of boiling salted water, cook the pasta until *al dente*; drain but do not rinse. In a large serving bowl, combine the pasta, celery sauce, chopped celery leaves,

## There's more to celery than just ribs—

*While celery's ribs may be its biggest contribution to cooking, other parts of the plant are full of flavor, too.*



### Celery seeds

The tiny, aromatic seeds of celery pack the vegetable's strong, distinctive taste. They lend celery's flavor to all kinds of dishes, including breads, crackers, soups, stews, and salads. Celery seasoning, often rubbed on meats and poultry before roasting or grilling, is made by grinding salt with celery seeds. For both the seed and the seasoning, a little goes a long way.



parsley, red pepper flakes, salt, and pepper. Toss well and serve immediately.

## Celery & Potato Purée

Celery purée alone makes a lovely sauce for poached chicken or fish. Mixing it with potatoes gives it a more substantial texture better suited for a side dish. Use milk instead of cream for a lighter version. *Serves four to six.*

**2 bunches celery (about 1¾ lb. each)**

**About ½ cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock or water**

**5 Tbs. unsalted butter**

**5 baking potatoes (8 oz. each), peeled and cut into large chunks**

**½ cup heavy cream**

**½ tsp. salt**

**¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**

**Pinch freshly grated nutmeg**

Remove the tough outer celery ribs; reserve for another use. Rinse the hearts well and dry them. Cut off the root and ½ inch off the top; chop the rest of the celery into approximately 1-inch pieces, including all the leaves. (You should have about 4 cups.)

In a large frying pan, combine the celery, stock, and 1 Tbs. of the butter. Cover and simmer over low heat until the celery is tender, about 30 min. Uncover and cook about 5 min. longer to evaporate the liquid. Remove from the heat and let cool slightly.

Meanwhile, in a large saucepan, cook the potatoes in boiling salted water until tender, about 20 min. Drain.

In a food processor, pulse the celery until smooth. If the purée is thin and watery, return it to the heat and reduce until thickened. (You should have about 1 cup celery purée.)

In a large mixing bowl, combine the potatoes, 4 Tbs. butter, the cream, salt, pepper, and nutmeg. With a potato masher or whisk, mash the potatoes until fairly smooth. Stir in the celery purée. Taste for seasoning and add salt and pepper as needed.



*A slow braise for a sweet celery and tomato dish. Pancetta joins this classic vegetable pairing to add a fuller, deeper flavor.*

## Two-Celery Soup

This simple, soothing soup benefits greatly from a good homemade stock. *Serves eight to ten.*

**1 large bunch celery (about 1¾ lb.)**

**3 Tbs. olive oil**

**1 medium celery root (about 1¼ lb.), peeled and cut into small dice**

**2 large leeks, well rinsed, white and some green cut into small dice**

**1 large starchy potato, peeled and cut into small dice**

**2 qt. homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock**

**Juice of ½ lemon**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**

**3 Tbs. chopped flat-leaf parsley**

**½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese**

Cut off the root and top of the celery. Rinse the celery well and dry. Reserve the leaves

and wrap them in a moist paper towel. Peel the tough fibers from the outer ribs. Chop the ribs into small dice. (You should have about 4 cups.)

Heat the olive oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add the celery, celery root, leeks, and potato. Sauté a few minutes until a strong celery aroma is released. Pour in the chicken stock, bring to a boil, and simmer until all the vegetables are tender, 40 to 50 min. Add the lemon juice, salt, pepper, parsley, and reserved celery leaves. Sprinkle each serving with Parmesan cheese. Serve hot.

*Erica De Mane is a chef, food writer, and cooking teacher who specializes in southern Italian cooking. She lives in New York City. ♦*

## try the seeds, leaves, and root



### Celery leaves

Celery leaves add a more subtle celery flavor to dishes. In Europe and in Asia, celery leaves are used as an herb, similar to the way we use parsley. Thin-ribbed Chinese celery, which you can find in Asian markets, is cultivated for its big leaves. Next time you buy celery, look for a bunch with fresh, leafy tops.



### Celery root or celeriac

Celery root is a separate strain of celery. Its beige, gnarled bulb looks impenetrable, but once peeled, the bulb is quite soft and easy to cut. Raw celery root is classically used in French *céleri rémoulade*, a grated celery root salad that's a standard on crudité platters. Cooked celery root is delicious when mashed with potatoes.





# A Rustic Supper Based on Savory Braised Veal

Quick searing and long simmering gives fork-tender meat and a rich sauce

BY MARK BLISS

**B**raised meat is old-fashioned food at its best. A deep, rich flavor results from long, slow cooking, not fancy ingredients, and when it's done, the meat is so tender it practically melts in your mouth.

I wish I could say those sensory pleasures are the main reason I love braising, but the reality is a little more pragmatic. When owner Bruce Auden and I opened Biga restaurant in San Antonio, we had a madhouse on our hands. We needed a menu that balanced dishes demanding last-minute attention with ones that could be prepared well in advance. Braising, a technique that calls for quick searing and long

Photos except where noted: Mark Thomas





*Do-ahead braised veal shanks are the centerpiece of a supper that's sumptuous yet easy to prepare ahead.*

simmering, was part of the solution. Braised meats take a long time to cook but require little preparation or attention. Also, braised foods often improve in flavor when they're cooked in advance, allowed to cool, and then reheated.

When entertaining at home, I often choose a braised dish for the menu for the same reasons I do at my restaurant. Simple preparation and long cooking time give me plenty of time to prepare the rest of the meal. For the menu here, I've taken an Italian classic, *ossobuco* (braised veal shank), and seasoned it with cumin, coriander, and lemon zest to give it a North African flavor. The remaining dishes—a salad of citrus and bitter greens, pasta to soak up the savory juices from the veal, sautéed greens, and fresh fruit for dessert—were all chosen to balance the rich and spicy flavors of the main dish.

## START WITH FAMILIAR TOOLS AND SIMPLE INGREDIENTS

Braising is certainly one of the easiest cooking techniques, but there are a few simple points to keep in

mind to ensure that your meat will be tender and richly flavored.

**Use a heavy pan that isn't too big.** Choose a roasting pan that can withstand both the oven and the stovetop and in which the ingredients fit snugly. Too much space in the pan will mean too much stock; you want enough liquid for a generous sauce, not soup. If your pan doesn't have a lid, cut a piece of kitchen parchment slightly smaller than the top. When it's time to put the meat in the oven, put the paper on top of the meat (this holds the steam and the flavor close to the meat), and cover the top of the pan with foil.

**Choose a tough cut of meat for tender results.** Braising's long, slow cooking is best for less tender cuts of meat. An animal's tougher working muscles—leg, shoulder, and neck—contain lots of collagen, which release natural gelatin into the dish. This tenderizes the meat and enriches the stock. While my recipe calls for veal shanks, this technique also can be used for lamb shanks, oxtail, or even chuck roast.

**Add spices and aromatics for complex flavors.** My braised dishes are literally layered with flavor. First, I marinate the veal shanks overnight with a Moroccan-inspired spice rub. Then I add roasted garlic, fresh herbs, and a generous strip of lemon zest to the braising liquid, along with a mix of chopped onion, celery, and carrot (called a *mirepoix*, pronounced meer-PWAH). The long cooking time means that the braise won't taste lemony, garlicky, or spicy; instead, all the flavors meld into a complex and savory whole.

**Try to use homemade stock.** Nothing beats homemade stock for braising liquid. Veal stock is my first choice for this dish, but even a full-flavored chicken stock is better than stock from cans. Canned stocks, even those low in sodium, can leave a salty aftertaste in the sauce. In a pinch, a low- or no-salt canned stock will do; bouillon cubes won't. You can also use water to braise, but your sauce will be much less flavorful.



*A light and tangy starter of sharp greens and grapefruit vinaigrette makes a nice foil for the richer dishes to come.*

## MENU

*Radicchio,  
Endive &  
Grapefruit  
Salad*



*Braised Veal  
Shanks with  
Moroccan  
Spices*



*Acini di Pepe  
Pasta with  
Zucchini &  
Peppers*



*Oven-Dried  
Tomatoes*



*Sautéed Red  
Swiss Chard  
with Garlic &  
Bacon*



*Fresh Fruit with  
Yogurt & Honey*



*Each ingredient creates a delicious dimension of flavor. The veal shanks simmer at length in herbs, spices, aromatic vegetables, and stock, making for a rich, complex-tasting dish.*



#### THE TECHNIQUE: BROWN, SIMMER, RELAX

Braising is a moist-heat cooking method, but the first step requires dry heat. The dry heat caramelizes the meat's juices and brings out its flavor and color. At the restaurant, where a hot grill is always ready, I brown the shanks over a live fire. At home, it makes more sense to sauté the meat in the roasting pan. Browning also brings out the flavors in vegetables, so I sauté the *mirepoix* until it's a deep gold before I use it.

**Add the stock and simmer.** Once the ingredients are browned, add a little wine and a lot of stock. Many braising recipes specify to add stock to cover one-third of the meat, but I like to use enough to cover half of the meat because I thicken the sauce by reduction, not by adding flour or other starch. The extra stock ensures enough sauce for everyone.

To reduce the cooking time, bring the stock to a boil on the stove before you put it in the oven. As soon as it reaches the boiling point, take it off the stove; too much boiling toughens the meat.

**Once the pan is in the oven, your hands are free...almost.** The veal shanks will take 2½ to

3 hours to cook, and for most of that time you can concern yourself with preparing the rest of the menu. You still need to do a certain amount of tending, however, such as skimming grease that floats to the top and turning the meat over occasionally to keep it evenly moistened. About halfway through the cooking time, you should take off the lid so the stock can begin to reduce. The meat will develop a nice glazed look if you turn it frequently during the last half hour of cooking.

#### SIMPLE COOKING LIQUID BECOMES A RICH SAUCE

One of the rewards of braising is the rich, glossy brown sauce the dish produces, redolent of the meat, wine, herbs, and spices. Once the meat is properly cooked, you'll take it from the pan and degrease the cooking liquid once more. If you're preparing the dish in advance, refrigerate the liquid overnight and remove the congealed fat in one piece.

Traditionally, when finishing the sauce for a braised dish, the *mirepoix* is puréed and returned to

## The essentials of braising veal shanks



**Boost the veal shanks' flavor with spices and sautéing.** Marinate the meat in spices overnight and then sauté for color and richness.



**Brown the vegetables, too.** Their natural sugars caramelize. When you deglaze with white wine, the caramelized bits flavor the sauce.



**Go from stove to oven in one pan.** After all the ingredients are placed in the roasting pan and brought to a boil on the stove, the pan goes in the oven.



**Turn braising liquid into a savory sauce.** Strain the liquid into a saucepan and then boil to intensify the taste and to thicken.



*You can't buy dried tomatoes like these. Tomatoes dried in your oven are sweet, tangy, and chewy but still tender.*



*Sometimes simple desserts are best. Serve fall fruits like fresh figs or ripe pears with a dollop of mascarpone cheese, whipped cream, or yogurt.*

the sauce. I like clear sauces, however, so I strain out the *mirepoix* and boil the cooking liquid until it's reduced to a sauce that coats the back of a spoon.

#### ROUND OUT THE BRAISING MENU WITH CONTRASTING FLAVORS

These veal shanks require side dishes that complement as well as provide some contrast to the rich, slightly spicy flavor of the meat. Here's what I'd serve:

**Tart citrus, creamy goat's cheese.** A radicchio, endive, and grapefruit salad is a refreshing contrast to the rest of the meal, and the salad's walnut oil and warm goat cheese provide a mellowing influence on the bitter-tart grapefruit.

**Tiny pasta with tiny vegetables to soak up the sauce.** I strongly recommend placing the veal shanks on a bed of pasta, rice, polenta, or potatoes to soak up the meat's delicious juices. I use a tiny pasta (*acini di pepe*) dotted with sautéed vegetables, but mashed potatoes or rice pilaf are also excellent. The oven-dried tomatoes I add as garnish are optional, but they're easy to make and provide a beautiful jolt of color and tartness.

**Simple sautéed greens.** Red Swiss chard accented with garlic and bacon is a rich side dish; you could say it's an upscale version of what Texans call "a mess of greens." I love the way it tastes with the veal.

**A grand finale on the humble side.** After a rich meal, I like to keep the dessert as light as I can. Fall and winter fruits—figs, pears, apples—make a delicious and simple ending. To keep things from becoming too austere, I like to top the fruit with gently whipped cream, mascarpone flavored with liqueur or eau-de-vie, or even plain yogurt sweetened with a bit of honey.

#### Radicchio, Endive & Grapefruit Salad

If you haven't used this method for sectioning a grapefruit without the membrane, this is a great time to try it. You'll never again do it any other way. *Serves six.*

*1 grapefruit  
3 Tbs. walnut oil  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper  
1 head radicchio, leaves separated and cut into strips  
1 head endive, torn into spears  
½ small red onion, sliced thin and rinsed in cold water  
1 small log soft goat cheese (about 3 oz.)  
¼ cup toasted, chopped walnuts*

**Peel and section the grapefruit.** Cut away both ends of the fruit down to the flesh. Set the fruit on the work surface and, with a sharp knife, cut away the skin, working in wide bands top to bottom. Cut through the skin and the underlying white pith, but try not to cut into the flesh.

Hold the peeled fruit over a bowl (this will catch the segments and juice), and begin cutting away each segment from the membrane. Slide the knife between the membrane and flesh on one side of a segment, and then slide it on the other side, cutting the segment free. Continue working around the fruit. When you've removed all the segments, squeeze the membranes to remove any remaining juice.

**Make the dressing.** Set the segments aside and strain the juice if necessary. You should have about 3 Tbs. of juice. Whisk together the grapefruit juice and walnut oil. Season with kosher salt and pepper to taste.

**Prepare the salad.** Arrange the radicchio and endive on plates. Garnish with grapefruit sections and red onion.

**Prepare the goat cheese.** Heat the oven to 350°F. Roll the goat cheese log in the chopped walnuts and slice the cheese into six cakes. Place the cakes on a baking sheet and bake for 5 to 6 min. They should be just warm, not soft and gooey. Set a warm goat cheese cake on top of each salad. Drizzle with the vinaigrette and serve.



## COUNTDOWN FOR BRAISED VEAL MENU

### 3 days before

- order the veal shanks
- make the spice rub

### 2 days before

- marinate the shanks in the spice rub
- make stock (if using homemade)
- roast the garlic

### 1 day before

- make the veal recipe up to "finish the sauce"; refrigerate
- dry the tomatoes in the oven overnight

### The morning of the meal

- make the *acini di pepe*
- make the sautéed chard

### Just before serving

- make the salad
- reheat the veal, *acini di pepe*, and sautéed chard in casseroles
- strain the veal cooking liquid and make the sauce
- slice fruits for dessert

## Braised Veal Shanks with Moroccan Spices

Spices, aromatic vegetables, and fresh herbs give these meaty shanks unmatched depth of flavor. *Serves six.*

6 veal shanks (about 3¾ lb. total)  
¼ cup Moroccan Spice Rub (see recipe at right)  
12 cloves garlic, skin on  
4 Tbs. olive oil  
3 Tbs. butter  
2 large onions, chopped  
2 large carrots, chopped  
3 large celery ribs, chopped  
1 cup white wine  
3-in. piece lemon zest, white pith removed  
1 large bouquet garni (2 bay leaves and 2 large sprigs each of thyme, rosemary, and parsley)  
5 cups homemade chicken, veal, or beef stock, or a mixture of low-salt canned chicken and beef stock  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Smear the shanks with the spice rub, cover, and marinate in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours, preferably overnight. Meanwhile, toss the unpeeled garlic cloves with 1 Tbs. of the olive oil and loosely wrap them in aluminum foil. Roast in a 400°F oven until the cloves are soft, 50 to 60 min. Set aside; refrigerate if more than 4 hours before braising.

Adjust the oven to 325°. Scrape excess marinade from the shanks.

**Brown the meat and vegetables.** Heat the rest of the olive oil in a large roasting pan or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. When the oil is very hot, add the shanks and sear until well browned, 5 to 6 min. on each side. Remove the shanks and set aside. Add the butter and when it starts to foam, add the onion, carrots, and celery, and sauté for 3 min. Turn the heat to low and continue sautéing until the vegetables are soft, golden brown, and caramelized, 25 to 30 min. If the vegetables start to stick to the pan, pour in a splash of white wine to deglaze. When the vegetables are ready, add the remaining wine, scraping up any browned bits, and reduce over high heat until the pan is nearly dry.

**Simmer all the ingredients.** Put the shanks back in the pan. Add the zest, *bouquet garni*, stock, and garlic cloves. The liquid should cover two-thirds of the meat; add more if needed. Bring to a simmer. Skim off any visible fat.

Cover the dish tightly and put it in the oven. After an hour, degrease the sauce again and baste the shanks with the liquid. Cover again and cook for another 45 min. Remove the cover and turn the shanks over. After another 15 min., turn the shanks again and check for doneness. Repeat every 15 min. until the shanks are fork-tender.

**If you're making the dish ahead,** refrigerate the cooking liquid and shanks separately. When you're ready to reheat the shanks, remove the fat from the liquid (it will have solidified into one piece) and discard it. Put the shanks and cooking liquid in a roasting pan, cover with foil, and reheat in a 400° oven for 15 to 20 min.

Remove the shanks from the liquid and keep warm.

**Finish the sauce.** Strain the sauce through a fine sieve into a small saucepan, pressing all liquid from the vegetables. Spoon off any grease from the liquid. You should have at least 2½ cups of liquid. Bring the sauce to a simmer and reduce it to about 1½ cups. Check the viscosity of the sauce as you go; if it coats the back of a spoon, it's ready. Taste the sauce and season with salt and pepper.



*Tiny pasta with bursts of flavor. In this versatile side dish, vegetables are diced small to complement the shape of the pasta.*

## Moroccan Spice Rub

Leftover spice rub is great for grilled pork chops. *Yields ½ cup.*

1 Tbs. ground cumin  
1 Tbs. paprika  
1 Tbs. ground black pepper  
1 Tbs. ground coriander  
1 tsp. cayenne  
½ tsp. ground cloves  
2 Tbs. lemon juice  
3 Tbs. chopped garlic  
¼ cup olive oil

Put all the ingredients in a food processor and blend, scraping the sides occasionally, until you have a paste.

## Acini di Pepe Pasta with Zucchini & Peppers

If you can't find the tiny, round *acini di pepe*, you can use tubettini or rice-shaped orzo. *Serves six.*

1¼ cups dry acini di pepe pasta  
3 Tbs. olive oil  
1 medium carrot, cut in small dice  
1 small onion, cut in small dice  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
¾ cup diced red or yellow bell peppers, or a mix  
1 medium zucchini, cut in small dice  
¼ cup white wine, more as needed  
3 Tbs. chopped parsley  
1 Tbs. chopped fresh oregano leaves (optional)  
¼ cup grated romano cheese  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

**Boil the pasta.** It should be tender in about 8 min. When done, drain it and rinse briefly under cool water. Return it to the pot, toss with 1 Tbs. olive oil, and set aside. You can do this up to a day ahead; if so, cover and refrigerate.



#### Olive oil

*1 pint cherry tomatoes, stems removed, rinsed, dried, and pierced with the tip of a knife*

*Kosher salt*

Lightly oil a large baking sheet with olive oil. Place the tomatoes, slit side up, on the baking sheet and sprinkle lightly with the kosher salt.

Put the tomatoes in the oven, turn the oven to 250°, and let the tomatoes dry for about 12 hours. The tomatoes should be shriveled but not crisp, and have a texture that's slightly "jammy" but not wet. If you're not going to use the tomatoes in a few days, put them in a jar, cover with olive oil, and refrigerate for up to 3 months.

### Sautéed Red Swiss Chard with Garlic & Bacon

Spinach is a good alternative to Swiss chard. *Serves six.*

*2 lb. red Swiss chard, washed, stems removed*

*4 thick slices of bacon, cut in small dice*

*3 cloves garlic, sliced thin*

*1 Tbs. butter*

*Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste*

Cut the Swiss chard leaves into long strips about 1 inch wide. Set aside.

Put the bacon in a frying pan and sauté over medium-low heat until nicely browned, about 12 min. Set the bacon on paper towels to drain and pour off all but 2 Tbs. fat from the pan. Add the garlic slices and sauté over medium heat until light golden brown, about 3 min. Remove the garlic and set aside. Add the chard leaves and butter to the pan and sauté until soft, about 5 min. Add the bacon and garlic, toss, and season with salt and pepper.

*Mark Bliss is a former musician who accidentally became a chef. He can be found at Biga in San Antonio, where he sometimes acts as owner Bruce Auden's left hand as well as his right. ♦*

*Stunning red chard becomes melt-in-your-mouth greens when sautéed with garlic and bacon.*

Heat a large frying pan over medium-high heat. Pour in the remaining oil, let it get hot, and then add the carrot and onion. Sauté over medium heat until the onion is soft and translucent, about 8 min. Turn the heat to high. Add the garlic, peppers, and zucchini and sauté for another 5 min. Don't let the garlic burn. The zucchini and peppers should be soft but not mushy. Deglaze with the wine.

Add the pasta and sauté over high heat, jerking the pan frequently so the ingredients mix well. If the pasta sticks, add a little more wine. When the pasta is heated through, remove the pan from the heat. Gently stir in the parsley, oregano, and romano. Season with salt and pepper.

### Oven-Dried Tomatoes

These are a delicious and beautiful accent to the braised veal. *Serves six as a garnish.*



## Wine Choices

**Rustic wines to suit the casual character of the braised veal menu**

*This hearty meal feels like what you'd find at a homey trattoria or bistro, so a rustic wine would be perfect.*

**Radicchio, Endive & Grapefruit Salad.** Since vinegar can make a wine taste spoiled, the tart grapefruit dressing makes this salad a good wine partner. The citrus-juice base needs a wine with good acidity so that the tang of the fruit and the goat cheese won't overwhelm it. The best choice would be a sparkling wine. Because the grapes

are picked young, sparkling wine has high acidity and a cleansing effervescence to soften the bite of radicchio and onion. Choose one with some nutty, caramelized flavors to pick up on the walnut oil and the goat cheese's walnut crust. Other good wines would be a not-too-grassy Sauvignon Blanc, a light, fruity Chardonnay, or a crisp Northern Italian white such as Pinot Grigio.

**Braised Veal Shanks with Moroccan Spices.** Because of the heady flavors in the spice rub, my

top choices are a Zinfandel, a red Rhône, or a Rhône-style wine from California or Australia. (Look for Mourvèdre, Grenache, or the heavier Syrah, or blends containing them.) These wines are fruity enough to balance the heat of the cayenne, and often the wines themselves show hints of clove, cinnamon, allspice, and cardamom, which are compatible with the dish and add complexity. With oven-dried tomatoes in the picture, these wines are an even better match. Zinfandel is a nat-

ural with tomato-based dishes. And tomatoes, a keystone of Provençal cuisine, have evolved with these same Rhône wines over the centuries. But this wonderfully spicy twist on *ossobuco* can handle just about any medium-weight red that isn't too tannic, such as a light Merlot, a Pinot Noir, or a good Chianti or Spanish Rioja. —*Rosina Tinari Wilson is a food and wine writer and teacher based in the San Francisco area. She is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.*



# Classic English Scones— Crisp Outside, Flaky Inside

Use big chunks of cold butter, barely mixed in, for the ideal texture

BY JACQUIE LEE



*Teacakes with a pedigree. These light, flaky scones are perfect as part of a traditional afternoon tea or as a light breakfast with a rich cup of coffee.*

My mother was half Chinese and my father was English, so naturally teatime was important in my parents' home. Tea-drinking in our family, however, was nothing compared with the tea rituals I experienced while visiting my grandmother in England. She would sit, rather regally, taking individual orders for tea, a silver pot of extra-hot water standing ready. But more important to me, she served scones.

My passion for this crisp-tender teacake began at my grandmother's table but was fueled by my later travels around England. From Salmon Leap in Devon, where I devoured marvelous round scones with strawberry jam and clotted cream, to ultra-upscale Harrod's in London, where the scones are served with a side order of pomp and ceremony, I tasted enough scones to develop my own idea of the perfect scone.

## JUDGING A PROPER SCONE

I always like to see what other bakeries have to offer, and I'm continually amazed at what's passed off as a scone. For me, a scone should be crispy outside and flaky inside; it should not have a cakey texture. Also, I prefer scones cut into triangles, probably because they're less likely to be confused with American-style biscuits.

## THIS QUICK DOUGH HAS THREE BASIC PARTS: FLOUR, BUTTER, AND A BUTTERMILK BINDER

Scones are made from a few simple, basic ingredients, but it's the way those ingredients are worked together that makes the difference between an ordinary scone and one that's exceptional. The key to flaky scones is to mix the dough as little as possible, keeping the butter in large chunks.

**Almost any flour will do.** The basic scone recipe (see p. 50) requires no special flours; I've eaten wonderful scones made with all-purpose flour. But because baking is my business, I prefer to use a blend of organic, unbleached bread and pastry flours. In particular, I like



**Large chunks of butter in the dough make the flakiest scone.** Chill your butter ahead of time and work quickly to keep the chunks from being totally incorporated into the dough.



**Don't overmix the dough or your scones will be tough.** Stop the paddle when the dough just begins to pull away from the sides of the bowl.

to bake with Giustos flours (available from Bob's Red Mill, 503/654-3215), a brand of organic of flours that I believe makes the lightest and flakiest scones. Blending bread flour and pastry flour helps me further fine-tune the dough's strength and tenderness. It can be fun to try several different kinds of bread and pastry flour and see the characteristics each contributes.

**For the best flavor, nothing beats unsalted butter.** I've tried many scone recipes that use vegetable shortening or lard, but I always come back to unsalted butter. The butter's flavor is an important part of the scone's rich taste. It's also the ingredient responsible for the scone's crisp, flaky texture.

Chilling the butter—and keeping it chilled—is a critical step towards a great scone: you want it to remain in fairly large pieces and not get squashed into the flour as you mix. When the scones are thrust into a very hot oven, the butter will melt and bubble its way through the dough, leaving lots of little crevices in its wake.

**Buttermilk holds it all together.** I make my scones with buttermilk because I like the tangy taste; besides, with all the butter in the scones, the fat in ordinary milk isn't needed. What is important is that you don't overmix the dough when you add the buttermilk. This can be a hard call if you've never made scones before. The difference in flours and climates and how the liquid is absorbed by the dry ingredients can make the critical moment difficult to judge. Just remember that when you add the liquid, you should mix just until the dough starts to pull away from the sides of the bowl. If not all of the flour is getting moist, add a little more liquid.

**A crust of coarse sugar.** I paint the tops of the scones with a little more buttermilk before giving them a sprinkle of turbinado sugar. The large, unrefined grains of this sugar give the scones a really crisp top. You can find turbinado sugar at many natural- and specialty-food stores. Substitute ordinary sugar for the turbinado if you like; the tops just won't be as crunchy.

## Scone, scon, scoon—how do you say it?



A young English friend of mine claims that whenever he hears *scone* pronounced with a long "o," like *own*, his whole body begins to shudder. He says that it's correctly pronounced *scon*. So as not to cause him bodily harm, I tried for some time to shorten up my "o".

Then I heard from another English friend who said, "I grew up

in a working-class family, and we pronounced it with the long 'o.' To pronounce it *scon* was considered very hoity-toity."

Later I was reminded that the Stone of Scone—the chunk of rock that forms the base of the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey—is pronounced *scoon*. So, it would appear that it's

*scone* for the working class, *scon* for the upper class, and *scoon* for the royal family.

With that tantalizing but inconclusive bit of information, choose your *own*, *on*, or *oon* pronunciation and start baking.

—Brinna Sands, vice president of Sands, Taylor & Wood, producers of King Arthur Flour





*Use lightly floured fingers to gently pat the dough into a disk. Don't worry if the dough doesn't look smooth—a rough, lumpy dough means tender, flaky scones.*



*Cut the disk into quarters and then again into eighths. Triangles are the traditional shape for scones, but you can shape the dough any way you please.*

### **CURRANTS, CRANBERRIES, CHERRIES, AND OTHER ACCENT FLAVORS**

Currants are a traditional favorite, but there are endless variations on the basic scone. You can add dried cranberries or dried cherries—simply add a half cup or so to the recipe. Grated citrus zest (particularly orange) lends a wonderful fragrance. Bittersweet chocolate bits make a delicious—if untraditional—scone. Or, for an even racier scone, try a combination of orange zest and chocolate. Add dried fruit and flavorings after the butter and before the liquid.

#### ***Baking out the butter.***

*Though these scones will still be very rich, a hot oven will cause some of the butter to ooze, leaving behind lots of crispy crevices.*

Fresh blueberries are also delicious in scones, but because fresh fruits are moist and tend to clump together in the dough, dust them with a little flour before mixing them into the dough. As with the dried fruit, add the blueberries after the butter and before the buttermilk. You can use

frozen blueberries; just don't defrost them or they'll become mushy and you'll have purple scones.

### **FREEZE LEFTOVER SCONES**

If you have any leftover scones, freeze them. Thaw them completely and reheat at 350°F for about seven minutes. Served with a bit of tea to get the day started or as an afternoon respite, however, your freshly baked scones probably won't be around long enough to have any leftovers.

### **Orange-Scented English Scones**

Add ½ cup dried currants, dried cranberries, dried cherries, bits of chocolate, or fresh blueberries to create a variety of scones. *Yields 8 medium scones.*

**8 oz. (1¾ cups) all-purpose flour (or 1 cup organic bread flour plus ¾ cup organic pastry flour)**  
**2 tsp. baking powder**  
**½ tsp. kosher salt**  
**1 Tbs. sugar**  
**Grated zest of 1 medium orange**  
**4 oz. (8 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes**  
**¾ cup buttermilk**  
**2 Tbs. turbinado sugar (optional)**

Heat the oven to 400°F. Combine the flour, baking powder, salt, and sugar in an electric mixer. Using the paddle attachment, mix in the orange zest. Add the butter and mix just until coated with flour. The butter chunks should remain fairly large—no less than half their original size. With the mixer set on a slow speed, add ¾ cup of the buttermilk and mix until just absorbed. Stop mixing when the dough begins to pull away from the sides of the bowl.

Scrape the dough from the bowl and shape it into a ball. With well-floured fingers, pat the dough into a 7-inch-diameter disk. Cut the disk into quarters and then again into eighths. Set the scones on a baking sheet lined with kitchen parchment and brush the tops with the remaining buttermilk. Sprinkle with turbinado sugar and bake until well browned, about 15 to 20 min.



*Traditional English scones are regularly on the menu at The Garden Bakery in Ukiah, California, which Jacquie Lee co-owns and operates. The café's namesake garden is the site of many relaxing afternoon teas. ♦*

# Tasting the True Beaujolais

Fruity and slightly spicy,  
this food-friendly wine has surprising character

BY KAREN MACNEIL

**M**ore than any other wine in the world (with the possible exception of Champagne), Beaujolais is associated with good times. There isn't a bistro in Paris that doesn't sell tons of the stuff. It's the wine everyone drinks at casual French parties.

In the United States, the sad misconception about Beaujolais is that it's a "once-a-year" wine, drunk around the end of November when signs in wine shops scream: *le Beaujolais est arrivé!* What has arrived, alas, is not real Beaujolais.

It's Beaujolais Nouveau, a grapey, goofy young wine made immediately after the harvest as a celebration wine. Gulpable and fresh, Beaujolais Nouveau is great fun, but as wines go, true Beaujolais is so much more delicious.



## THE REAL THING

Beaujolais comes from one place only: the southern part of Burgundy in France. The vineyards carpet low granite hills for some 35 miles north to south. On the east is the Saône river valley; on the west, the "Monts de Beaujolais," a mountainous spur of the Massif Central. Interspersed among the vines are 96 villages, 10 of which are the famous *crus* (pronounced KROO) where the best Beaujolais comes from. (More about those in a moment.)

**Beaujolais is made with gamay grapes and an unusual winemaking method.** The wine's personality begins with the gamay grape, the only one used to make Beaujolais. Gamay's flavors are virtually unmistakable: a rush of sweet black cherry and black raspberry, then a hint of peaches, violets, and roses, and then a smidgen of peppery spiciness on the end. Moreover, in many red wines, the dry, tight compound



*Beaujolais has been called the only white wine that happens to be red. An apt reference, for despite its vivid magenta color, real Beaujolais has the same expressiveness and thirst-quenching qualities as a white wine.*



known as tannin acts as a cloak over the fruit flavors of the wine. Not so in Beaujolais. Because gamay is naturally low in tannin, its already profuse fruitiness seems even more dramatic.

Beaujolais' fruity character comes, however, not solely from gamay, but also from the unusual manner in which the wine is made. The process, long a tradition in the region, is called semicarbonic maceration. Instead of being crushed, the clusters of ripe grapes are put whole into a closed fermenting vat. The weight of the grapes on top crushes the bunches on the bottom, and the juice that leaks out ferments naturally. As part of the fermentation, carbon-dioxide gas is given off, bathing the uncrushed bunches on top and causing them to undergo "intercellular fermentation"—that is, fermentation takes place inside each grape.

Once Beaujolais is made, it rests in stainless-steel tanks (a few growers also put it briefly in small, relatively new oak barrels) for five to nine months

before being sold. Though five months may not seem like a long time, it's just enough to take the grapey newborn edge off the wine and allow it to evolve more fruit, flower, and spice flavors.

#### WHETHER IT'S BASIC, BETTER, OR THE VERY BEST, BEAUJOLAIS IS ALWAYS A BARGAIN

French law defines three types of Beaujolais. In ascending quality (and price) they are:

◆ **Beaujolais.** The basic stuff is labeled simply "Beaujolais." The grapes come mainly from less distinguished vineyards in the south. Soils there are more fertile and the land is flatter. The wines, as a result, tend to be lighter, with less fruit concentration, though there are exceptions.

◆ **Beaujolais-Villages.** Beaujolais-Villages, a notch better in quality, comes from 39 villages in the hilly midsection of the region. Soils here are poorer (with some granite and sand), forcing the vines to struggle more and, ultimately, to yield better grapes. Beaujolais-Villages wines are generally a blend of wines from several villages.

◆ **Cru Beaujolais.** Better still are the *cru* Beaujolais. These wines come from ten designated villages—or *crus*—located on the steepest granite hills (about 1,000 feet in elevation) in the northern part of Beaujolais (see the map opposite). The *cru* wines tend to have significant personality and fruit concentration. They also generally age longer than basic Beaujolais since they have more grip, structure, tannin, and acidity. Many wine lovers drink *cru* Beaujolais when it is between two and five years old.

No matter what level of Beaujolais you buy, the wine packs a lot of flavor for the penny. Regular Beaujolais, for example, is a steal at \$6 to \$8 per bottle. Even



**Beaujolais is gamay.** Fruity, slightly spicy gamay grapes are the only ones used to make Beaujolais.

**Grape juice becoming wine** displays a frothy head from fermentation gases.



## A little madness accompanies the arrival of Beaujolais Nouveau



Beaujolais Nouveau (also called *vin primeur* or "first wine") is regular Beaujolais, generally from the lesser districts, when it's about seven weeks old. Beaujolais Nouveau accounts for a third of all Beaujolais production. Like Thanksgiving, it's meant to be enjoyed as a harvest celebration.

At exactly one minute after midnight on the third Thursday of November, the doors of

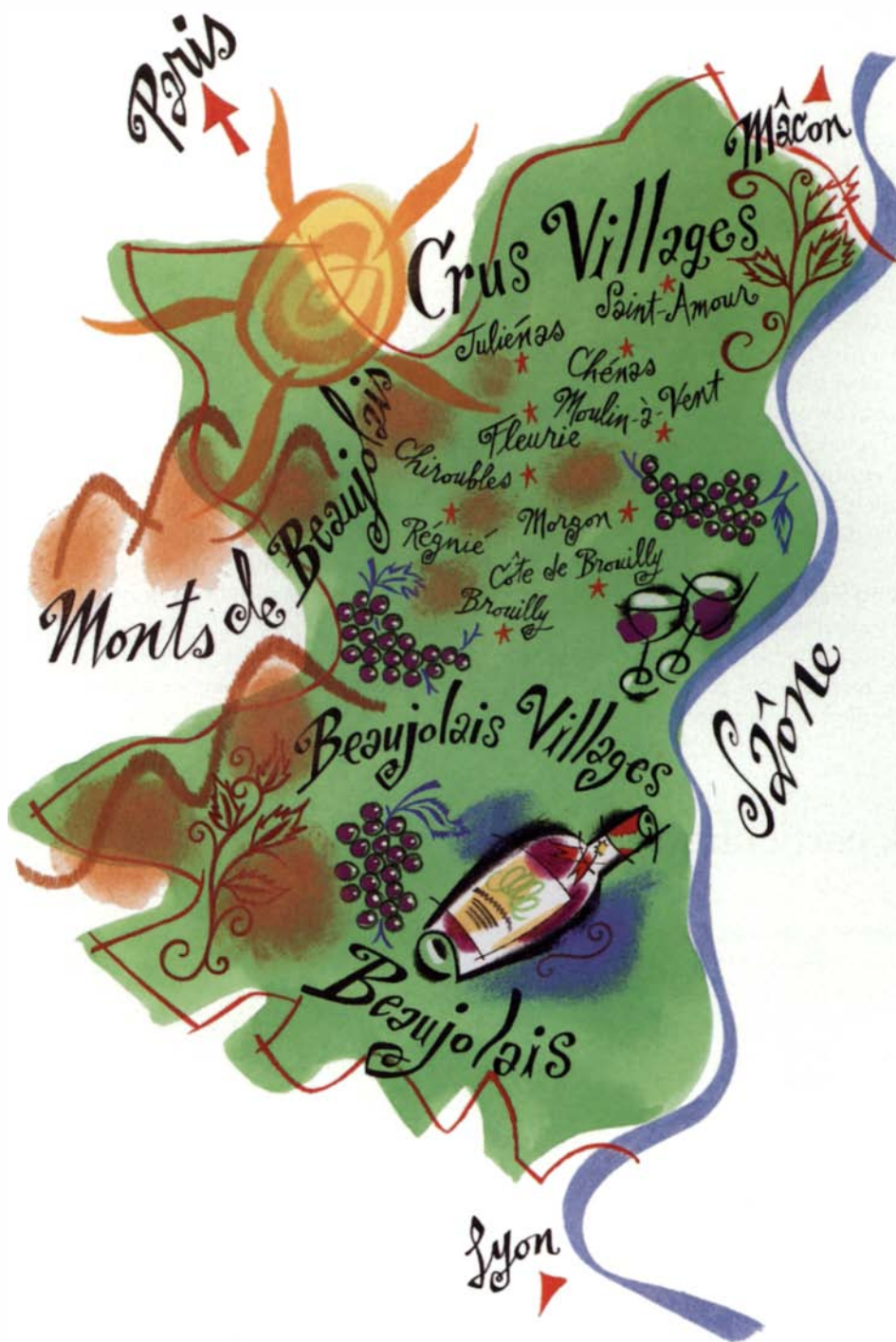
warehouses throughout Beaujolais fly open and the spectacle begins. Producers race to get the new wine into the hands (and mouths) of wine drinkers around the world as quickly as possible. Some rush it on speedy French trains to Paris where it's loaded into the belly of the Concorde and flown to points across the world. In cities like New York and San Francisco,

Beaujolais Nouveau arrives in time for lunch.

Of course, the parties don't stop once the wine has *arrivé*. With great fanfare, cases are transported in stretch limos, antique cars, even wheelbarrows, to restaurants where they're used for special celebration meals. For their part, imbibers may be in black tie—or T-shirts. The best T-shirts proclaim, "Just Arrived!"

# The crus—the top ten villages of Beaujolais

From north to south, here are the ten villages that produce some of the most distinctive Beaujolais, and descriptions of their namesake wines.



**Saint-Amour**—The northernmost *cru*. Rich, silky, and sometimes spicy, with an aroma said to be like peaches. The name means "holy love."

**Juliéna**s—Rich and relatively powerful, with a spicy flavor. Said to have a bouquet of peonies. Named after Julius Caesar. Very popular in Paris.

**Chénas**—Supple and graceful, with a subtle bouquet of wild roses and slightly of oak. This is the smallest of the Beaujolais *crus*.

**Moulin-à-Vent**—Hearty, rich, and well balanced in texture, bouquet, and flavor. With Fleurie and Morgon, this *cru* is said to age the best. The name, which means "windmill," is in honor of a three-hundred-year-old stone windmill that rises above the vines.

**Fleurie**—Velvety, with a bouquet both floral and fruity. Considered the most feminine Beaujolais, yet still a full, round wine.

**Chiroubles**—Grapes for Chiroubles come from some of the highest vineyards in the region. The wines are very low in tannin and light, often with a bouquet of violets.

**Morgon**—Has a personality that stands apart from all the other *crus*. Rich and masculine, deep purple in color, with a taste of apricots, peaches, and what the French call *goût de terroir*, or taste of the earth. Sometimes mistaken for Burgundy.

**Côte de Brouilly**—On the slopes of Mont Brouilly, an extinct volcano. Heady and lively, with a deep fruity quality and light body.

**Régnié**—The newest *cru* (added in 1988). Relatively full bodied and round, with red currant and raspberry flavors.

**Brouilly**—Fruity and grapey, with aromas of raspberries and currants. Relatively light bodied. This is the largest *cru*.



the top cru from the top producers rarely costs more than \$15 and is usually around \$10.

#### TRADITIONAL METHODS ENSURE THE BEST BEAUJOLAIS

Unfortunately, Beaujolais' commercial success (fueled by the wild popularity of Beaujolais Nouveau) has led most growers and producers to take shortcuts in wine-making. Also, the number of grapes per vine, known

as the yield, is often stretched to the maximum allowed by law, resulting in wines with a less concentrated flavor. (In general, a low yield produces a better wine.)

Beaujolais made in this commercial way can often taste more tutti-fruity than truly fruity. Its flavor is often a dead ringer for Jell-O.

Most commercial Beaujolais is blended, bottled, and sold by *négociants*. These are

individuals or firms who buy separate lots of wine from the region's 4,200 growers and 19 cooperatives. The final blended wine is always labeled with the *négociant's* name. The leading Beaujolais *négociant* is Georges Duboeuf.

**Keeping winemaking traditions alive.** By comparison, "old-style" Beaujolais is made by a very small percentage of growers (who are often considered fanatics). These traditional growers keep yields low and use time-honored practices in their winemaking.

There is no foolproof way to tell traditionally made Beaujolais from commercially made. You will find, however, that traditional-style Beaujolais usually costs a little more, is bottled by an individual estate rather than a *négociant*, and is generally imported into the United States by a handful of selected importers who specialize in small estates (the name of the importer will be on the label). These importers include:

- ◆ Kermit Lynch,
- ◆ Alain Jugenet,
- ◆ Louis/Dressner,
- ◆ Martine's Wines, and
- ◆ Weygandt-Metzler.

#### TO CHILL OR NOT TO CHILL

Chill it. When Beaujolais is cool—not cold—to the touch (about fifteen minutes in the refrigerator), its flavors explode with fruit and spice. Chilling the wine is in fact customary in the region. Historically, on Sundays, jugs of Beaujolais would be set in buckets of cold water and placed under the shade of a tree in the center of the village so that men playing *boules* (the French version of lawn bowling) would have something to slake their thirst.

The famous chef Paul Bocuse has written that one of the favorite traditional desserts of wine growers in Beaujolais is freshly picked wild peaches sliced into a glass, topped with black currants, and drenched in cool Beaujolais.

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*Karen MacNeil, a wine and food writer, teacher, and consultant based in Sausalito, California, is the author of the forthcoming Wine Primer (Workman Books). ◆*



**White Beaujolais.** Beaujolais Blanc exists, although only a minuscule amount is made (about 2% of the total Beaujolais production). Beaujolais Blanc and Beaujolais-Villages Blanc are generally made from either chardonnay or aligoté grapes.

## A fine match with food, particularly spicy or simple dishes

If there's a red wine that's flexible, it's Beaujolais. The gamay grape's expressive fruitiness is a terrific sweet counterpoint to dishes that have a lot of seasoning and spice in them: anything with cumin,

coriander, or pepper, for example, or dishes with a complex mix of green herbs, or even curries and



stir-fries. Beaujolais' fruit flavors and especially its lack of scratchy tannins also make it one of the best accompaniments to vegetables and salads.

For a satisfying, casual meal,



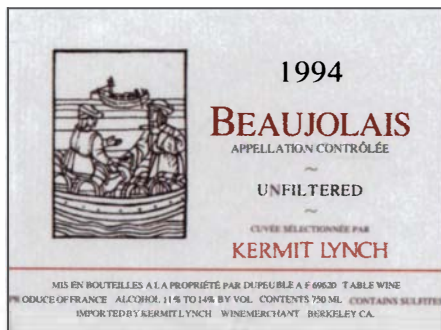
nothing beats a dinner of grilled vegetables, a salad with warm goat cheese, and a glass of cool Beaujolais. The sweet slow-cooked meatiness of dishes like chicken pot pie or beef stew pick up and mirror the sweet softness of the wine.

Finally, the stone fruit and berry flavors in Beaujolais make it

a good match with fresh fruit. A traditional dessert of wine growers in the region is slices of freshly picked wild peaches topped with black currants and drenched in cool Beaujolais.



# Five of my favorite Beaujolais



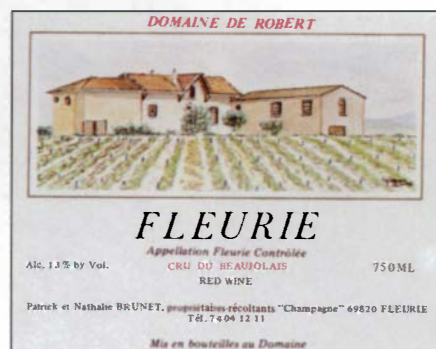
**Kermit Lynch Beaujolais.** *This wine has such a heady aroma that you feel as though you've stuck your nose into a basket of just-picked black raspberries and roses. The berry fruit flavors are ripe, dense, and showered with spiciness. About eight dollars.*

Wine shops are full of simple, tasty Beaujolais. The ones listed here, however, are more serious, focused wines that have a greater range of flavors and better structure.—Karen MacNeil



**Paul Janin Moulin à Vent "Domaine des Vignes du Tremblay."** *One of the most elegant, structured Beaujolais around. When a bottle from a great vintage is first opened, the fruit is so encapsulated by the tannin that the wine just sits there like a stubborn child. Within about ten minutes,*

*however, there's an uncanny explosion of saturated berry fruit flavor. A real mouth-filler of a wine. About fourteen dollars.*



**Georges Duboeuf Fleurie "Domaine des Quatre Vents."** *Blasting sweet cherries is Duboeuf's signature flavor—usually. Not so this Fleurie. This is a rich, gorgeous wine with berry/peachy/gingery flavors that seem to tap-dance softly in the mouth. Duboeuf makes dozens of wines, but the few that carry the name of the original estate are always among the best. About ten dollars.*



**Patrick Brunet Fleurie "Domaine de Robert."** *Yikes! The panoply of fruit flavors in this Fleurie is mesmerizing. There's every ripe red and black berry imaginable, plus loads of spice, vanilla, coconut, and a bracing touch of citrus. The fruit rolls like waves in the mouth. About thirteen dollars.*



**Prosper Maufoux Brouilly.** *Here's a thick jammy Brouilly with deep, satisfying black berry fruit, nicely laced with black spices. The texture of this wine is almost syrupy. If there's red meat on the grill, this would be a good Beaujolais to go for. About twelve dollars.*



# The Art of Making



Stretching the dough until it's tissue-thin makes a light, flaky pastry

BY BILL GORMLEY

*Bill Gormley recently taught baking and pastry at the New England Culinary Institute in Essex, Vermont. Before that, he was the executive pastry chef at the Russian Tea Room in New York City.*



**1** Use the backs of your hands to stretch the dough. Slowly pull your hands toward your body one at a time. Work over a tablecloth or sheet.

When I was first learning to make strudel, as an assistant pastry chef at a small bakery, my boss used to say the dough wasn't stretched thin enough unless he could read a newspaper through it. At first I thought that would be impossible, but I soon learned to pull the dough until it was sheer as tissue. Our weekly dough-making ritual attracted customers who would watch us pull and stretch a fluttering sheet of pastry that always seemed on the verge of tearing.

Such thin dough is crucial to the texture of good strudel. When the dough is rolled around a filling and then baked, the resulting layers produce a light, flaky pastry. To get a similar texture with less effort, many chefs use prepared phyllo dough—dry, paper-thin sheets of dough that are sold frozen. But making strudel from scratch is actually quite fun, especially if you can get some friends involved. Make your dough in advance to give it time to rest. Then invite some guests to dinner and have them lend a helping hand—literally—with dessert.

## CHOOSE A HARD FLOUR TO MAXIMIZE STRETCH

The way strudel dough is stretched—and stretched and stretched—seems almost miraculous. The miracle-maker is gluten, the substance in the dough that makes it elastic. You get gluten when you mix flour and water and knead the mixture.

To make strudel dough, you want to use a hard flour. *Hard* refers to the wheat kernel's hardness, which is a measure of protein content (the harder the kernel, the higher the protein). It's the proteins in the flour that form the gluten. Hard flour is also called strong flour and bread flour. You can use all-purpose flour, which blends hard and soft flours to accommodate all forms of baking, but it may not hold up as well.

## MAKE THE DOUGH AHEAD TO GIVE IT TIME TO REST

To make the strudel dough, simply mix the flour and salt in a large mixing bowl (see recipe on p. 59). Make a well in the center and add the butter, eggs, water,



**4** A sign of well-stretched dough. Seeing is believing—you really can read the paper through this dough.

and lemon juice. (The acid in the lemon juice helps strengthen and stabilize the gluten strands.) Mix the liquid ingredients until combined, and then start drawing in the flour with your fingertips; mix until you have a soft, elastic dough. Transfer the dough to a clean surface and knead it until it's smooth and pliable, about 10 minutes. Or, you can mix and knead the dough with an electric mixer with a dough hook

# Strudel from Scratch



**2** *Keep your movements in sync and try to pull equally. As an area becomes thin, move to where the dough is thicker.*



**3** *Let the dough hang over the table's edge as it nears its full size. When this thin, the dough tears easily. A few holes are okay.*



**5** *Brush the dough with melted butter to keep it supple and to add flavor.*



**6** *Sprinkle the dough's surface with crumbs—savory or sweet—to prevent the strudel layers from sticking together.*



**7** *Trim the thick, uneven edges with a knife or scissors before rolling.*

attachment. Simply put all the ingredients in the mixing bowl and mix on low speed until the dough forms a ball, about 10 minutes. Turn the dough into a clean bowl and lightly oil its top to prevent it from drying. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let it rest for 1½ hours. Meanwhile, make your filling (see recipes on p. 59), because once the dough is stretched, you need to use it right away.

## THE DOUGH IS DELICATE, SO TAKE OFF YOUR RINGS

Once your dough has rested, you're ready to stretch it. Gather up a clean tablecloth or sheet (the heavier the better), a rolling pin, a pastry brush, a knife or kitchen shears, a half stick of butter (melted), and about 1⅓ cups cake crumbs or breadcrumbs, depending on whether your filling is sweet or savory. (Make cake crumbs by crumbling a few

slices of purchased pound cake or other plain white cake.)

**You need a large work surface for stretching the dough.** Cover a large table with the clean cloth and dust it with flour. Roll the dough into a ¼-inch-thick oval on the cloth, and let it rest about 5 minutes. While the dough is resting, remove all jewelry from your fingers and wrists; your rings, bracelets, or watch could tear through the dough as you stretch it.





**8** Spoon the filling along one shorter side of the dough a few inches from the edge. Fillings may be savory or sweet.



**9** Roll the dough around the filling, using the sheet below it to lift it and get it rolling.



**10** Cut the rolled strudel in half, butter the top, and sprinkle on the topping. Score the top with a sharp knife and bake.

**Stretching the dough takes patience and a light touch.** Though you may be tempted to simply grab the dough and pull on it, resist that urge. Instead, shape both hands into very loose fists, palms facing down. Slide your hands under the dough and lift it off the table using the back of your hands. Stretch the dough toward your body, one hand at a time. As an area of dough becomes thin, move on to where the dough is thicker. If you have help, make sure everyone uses equal pressure with each stretch. Synchronizing all this can be a challenge.

If there are only two of you, work opposite each other as you stretch; if you have four people, spread yourselves out around the dough. Throughout the stretching process, put the dough down and let it rest for a few seconds before continuing on.

**A few holes in the dough are all right.** Making strudel for the first time, and even the second and third time, requires concentration. Inevitably, someone will tear the dough by applying too much pressure or using his or her fingertips. If this happens, don't panic. You can often patch a hole if it isn't too large. Snip off a portion of the dough from the outer edge, stretch it thin, and place it over the hole. If the tear is too large to repair, leave it alone and continue to stretch the

rest of the dough, being careful that you don't increase the size of the hole. Holes in your dough won't affect the taste of your strudel, but you may end up with fewer layers because of them.

#### GET READY TO ROLL

Your finished dough, fully stretched and transparent, should measure at least 36x40 inches. Don't worry if the edges of the dough are thicker than the middle; you can trim these uneven edges with the knife or shears. Allow the dough

to rest for about 10 minutes. The dough will start to dry and may shrink slightly, which is fine. Just be careful the dough doesn't get too dry or it will crumble, making it

The way strudel dough is stretched—and stretched and stretched—seems almost miraculous.

impossible to work with.

**Melted butter keeps the raw dough supple and makes the cooked dough crisp.** When the dough is slightly dry with a parchment-like quality, brush it all over with melted butter. The butter not only makes the strudel leaves crisp when baked, but it also gives them flavor. Sprinkle the entire surface evenly with the breadcrumbs or cake crumbs. This layer of crumbs helps absorb moisture from juicy fillings and prevents the strudel leaves from sticking together.

Spread your filling (see recipes [at right](#)) about 3 inches in from one shorter edge.



A tart, sweet apple strudel tastes best right out of the oven. Use a sharp serrated knife to slice.

Strudel means whirlpool in German, which is what the many rolled layers of this savory mushroom- and spinach-filled strudel resemble.



Using the cloth to get started, roll the dough around the filling and keep rolling to the end of the dough. Brush the top of the rolled strudel with the remaining melted butter and sprinkle on cheese or sugar, depending on whether your strudel is savory or sweet. Cut the strudel in half and set each half, seam side down, on parchment-lined jelly roll pans. Or lift the whole roll onto the pan and bend it into a gentle U shape, which is another traditional way to present strudel. With a sharp knife, score steam vents in the tops of the strudels at 2-inch intervals, making the cuts just deep enough to hit the top of the filling. Bake the strudels in a 350°F oven for 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the filling. The top of the strudel should cook to a golden brown. To test if the filling is cooked, insert a skewer into the strudel; if the skewer is hot when withdrawn, your strudel is ready to eat.

### Strudel Dough

*Yields two 18-inch strudel rolls; each roll serves six to seven.*

18 oz. (4 cups) bread flour or all-purpose flour  
1½ tsp. salt  
4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened  
2 eggs  
½ tsp. fresh lemon juice or vinegar  
1 cup warm (85° to 90°F) water

#### FOR ASSEMBLY:

1½ cups breadcrumbs or cake crumbs, depending on filling  
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted  
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese, or ¼ cup sugar plus 1 tsp. cinnamon, depending on filling

### Mushroom & Spinach Filling

A mix of mushrooms, domestic and wild, makes this savory filling stand out. *Yields 8 cups; fills two 18-inch strudel rolls.*

4 Tbs. olive oil  
2 large onions, diced  
6 large cloves garlic, minced  
2½ lb. assorted mushrooms, cleaned, trimmed, and chopped  
2 lb. fresh spinach, washed and stemmed  
½ cup Madeira wine  
⅔ cup dried, plain breadcrumbs  
6 Tbs. freshly grated Parmesan cheese  
2 tsp. chopped fresh thyme  
1½ tsp. salt or to taste  
1½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper or to taste

Heat the oil in a large frying pan over medium heat. Add the onions and garlic and cook, stirring often, until the onions are translucent. Turn the heat to medium high. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring often, until they have given off their juices, about 7 min. Add the spinach and Madeira and cook 2 min., until the liquid is almost evaporated. Remove from the heat. Stir in the breadcrumbs, Parmesan, thyme, salt, and pepper. Cool to room temperature before using.

### Cranberry Filling

This filling needs to chill overnight. *Yields 9 cups; fills two 18-inch strudels.*

1½ cups red Zinfandel wine, or other fruity, full-bodied wine  
1½ cups freshly squeezed orange juice  
6 Tbs. sugar  
1 tsp. ground cinnamon  
1½ lb. dried cranberries  
2 cups chopped toasted pecans

In a large saucepan, combine the wine, orange juice, sugar, cinnamon, and cranberries. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium and simmer rapidly until the cranberries are soft and the liquid has reduced to about 4 Tbs., about 25 min. Refrigerate overnight. Before using, stir in the nuts.

### Apple Filling

Use a tart cooking apple, such as Granny Smith, for this traditional filling. *Yields 10 cups; fills two 18-inch strudels.*

6 apples, peeled, cored, and sliced thin  
½ cup raisins  
½ cup chopped walnuts  
½ cup sugar  
4 Tbs. confectioners' sugar  
2 tsp. ground cinnamon  
1 cup cake crumbs  
4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted

In a large mixing bowl, combine all the ingredients, tossing gently until the apples are well coated. Chill until ready to use.

Linda Ruppe assisted Bill Gormley with the writing of this article. ♦





*What's the right name for this unique mushroom? The English name, "king bolete," is rarely used by cooks. The Italian "porcini," which means roly-poly little pigs, is playfully descriptive and rolls off the tongue in a way that suits the mushroom. You'll also see this mushroom sold by its French name, "cèpe."*



# Fresh or Dried, Porcini Have

Here's how to get the best from this prized wild mushroom

BY JON ROWLEY

For more than twenty years, I've been an ardent "pot hunter," one who picks wild mushrooms for the kitchen. Porcini—the large, meaty, nutty-flavored mushroom—is one of my favorite quarries. When the season and conditions are just right, I go into the woods with my basket, compass, and pocketknife, as full of anticipation as a kid before an Easter egg hunt. Finding porcini, no matter how long you have been at it, is an addictive thrill.

## **PORCINI HAVE TWO DISTINCT CULINARY SOULS: FRESH AND DRIED**

Fresh and dried porcini are different ingredients with different qualities, and they're used differently in cooking. Think of the difference between tomatoes and sun-dried tomatoes, grapes and raisins, plums and prunes.

When porcini are fresh, they have a meaty quality that responds well to grilling and sautéing. The autumn porcini season is much-heralded in Europe. In Italy, when large quantities of fresh porcini are brought to village markets the day they're picked, a local café might serve the whole fresh caps, grilled and seasoned, almost like steaks. Or the fresh porcini might be sliced, sautéed in olive oil, and dosed with shallot, garlic, and an herb such as marjoram, oregano, mint, or parsley. Sometimes a squeeze of lemon juice adds just the right touch.

Italians, as well as Poles, Russians, and other Europeans, like to marinate the prized young porcini buttons whole. In Russia, a mock caviar is made from a mince of the marinated mushrooms.

In northeastern Europe, where wild-



*The pure flavor and aroma of porcini jump out of this simple sauté with shallots, parsley, and lemon.*

# a Potent Appeal

mushroom foraging is practically a state religion, fresh porcini are sautéed or stewed with sour cream and onions (dill is the herb of choice) or combined with potatoes in a skillet or in a casserole. Fresh porcini are also used in pastries, in soups, and as fillings; whole caps are stuffed and baked.

**Though I adore the flavor of fresh porcini, I did have a little problem with their texture** (I found the cooked caps slightly slimy) until I mentioned this textural quirk to Julia Child. She knew exactly what I meant, and she suggested a recipe that deals very effectively—and deliciously—with the problem, as it treats the caps and stems separately (see p. 63).

Another technique I use to give me a more pleasing texture is to grind the cap into a coarse mince (much like a classic French duxelles). I just sauté the minced

porcini in butter or olive oil and season with a little shallot and garlic. Then I do wonderful things with it, such as pile it on toast (my daughter eats this as fast as I can make it), fold it into mashed potatoes, stuff fillets of fish, and toss it with pasta.

## PICKING A FRESH PORCINI

Whether you're in the market or the forest, look for firm, rounded caps with white undersides. Fresh caps vary in color from ivory to tawny doeskin to biscuit brown to cinnamon. As a rule (to which you will find many exceptions), the darker the cap, the more intense the flavor. Look for the tubes under the cap to be white, tight, and firm, indicating young porcini. As the mushroom matures, the tubes become yellowish and then olive green, and the shape of the cap changes from convex to

flat. Porcini are large mushrooms, often weighing one or two pounds each. Unfortunately, the largest are usually not the best because they're often infested with insect larvae and beginning to deteriorate (see sidebar on p. 62).

**The flavor and texture of fresh porcini also depend on the age of the mushroom** and how it was handled after harvest. These large mushrooms can be bruised by their bearing weight alone. You can't always see the bruises, but they'll give your mushrooms a slightly sour taste and a more slimy texture. Rough handling also speeds spoilage. In the field, I pick into a basket lined with spongy dry moss or soft pine boughs and try to keep the mushrooms a single layer deep.

Fresh porcini, which cost \$20 to \$30 per pound, are best if eaten no later than the second day after being picked. Untouched by insects and properly handled, young porcini will last nearly a week. With today's overnight delivery services, shipping fresh porcini is possible. I've done it. It's great when it works, but because of the insect problem and the mushroom's perishability, it's a dicey proposition at best.

## Give fresh porcini a gentle brush-off.

Avoid washing fresh porcini unless absolutely necessary. They absorb water easily, which can interfere with proper cooking or drying. Use a soft brush to remove pine needles and soil. There's no need to



*If you find porcini like these, cook them quickly. The season is short, and the mushrooms are very perishable.*



peel fresh porcini, but some people remove the spongy tubes on the underside of mature caps if they're soft. Cut away any spoiled or buggy sections of the mushroom. Unlike cultivated mushrooms, porcini and other wild varieties need to be cooked before eating. You can eat both the cap and the stem. The two parts of the porcini are often dealt with separately, because each has its own texture: the stem is denser and the cap reminds me of a firm pillow.

## DRIED PORCINI WILL BECOME A STAPLE IN YOUR PANTRY

The season for fresh porcini is maddeningly short, but you can use dried porcini all year long in countless ways, and they're a lot easier to find. Once you start cooking with them, you'll likely find dozens of uses, such as in sauces, stews, soups, pasta dishes, risottos, and even in bread. They're the perfect seasoning for those who cook and eat more vegetarian dishes, but who miss the rich taste of meat. If stored in airtight bags or jars, dried porcini aren't perishable, so they'll wait patiently in your cupboard until you're ready to use them. Sometimes dried porcini develop more intense flavors after long storage.

If you're lucky enough to have a surplus of fresh specimens, you can dry them yourself. I first did this after a major find in

southeast Alaska—my first and best-ever find: three enormous but perfect porcini, the largest of which was at least five pounds. (I still dream about them.)

I brought my haul back onto my commercial salmon boat, where I cut the porcini in slices, and then threaded the pieces (with a sail needle) into garlands, which I hung overhead wherever I could find room. In a matter of hours, my not-so-

**Porcini are the perfect seasoning for those who cook vegetarian dishes but miss meat's rich taste.**

large galley was redolent with that rich, nutty, woody, undeniably erotic aroma of drying porcini. When the mushrooms were as dry as they would get (brittle enough to snap), I stowed them in zip-lock freezer bags. As I drew from my serendipitous stash little by little during that fall and winter, I learned about the extraordinary character of the dried porcini.

**You can buy dried porcini in most grocery stores, and of course in specialty**

shops or by mail-order. Expect to pay \$4 to \$5 for half-ounce packets. This translates to about \$150 per pound, but the price gets much more reasonable when you buy in larger quantities. At around \$50 a pound, you won't hesitate to use them whenever you want to add a deep, smoky note to a dish. And a little dried porcini goes a long way. One pound of dried starts with ten pounds of fresh.

The best-quality porcini should be free of any sign of what one dealer friend refers to as "thread and lace," the rough texture and pinholes made by insects vacating the mushrooms during drying. The less perfect specimens should be priced accordingly. For tips on choosing the best-quality dried porcini, see the sidebar at right.

## WITH DRIED PORCINI, THE SOAKING LIQUID IS THE MAIN INGREDIENT

As with any dried mushroom, dried porcini need a thorough soaking before use. For each half-ounce of dried porcini, I add one cup of hot water. You should add or subtract mushrooms from that ratio to modify the intensity of the liquid to suit your particular recipe.

Soak the porcini for 30 minutes, and then take the mushrooms out and squeeze out all the liquid. Strain the liquid through a coffee filter to remove any soil or mulch that may have dried with the mushrooms. This is your porcini liquor—a potent name for a potent ingredient. Use it sparingly, because too strong a flavor can overwhelm and ruin a dish.

The liquor's flavor fades quickly, so if you don't use the porcini liquor the same day, freeze it. (You can use the mushroom pieces, after a quick rinse, but they're of secondary importance.)

**Make an earthy "spice" from dried porcini.** Another way to use dried porcini is to turn them into a fine powder with an electric coffee grinder. The flavor and aroma of porcini powder is released by contact with moisture. Season fish or chicken by patting on a light coating of the powder. Add a small spoonful to a sauce or broth, dust it over steamed vegetables, or even work it into bread or pasta dough. Make only small quantities of powder at one time, though, because the flavor can become unpleasantly strong when exposed to air for a long period.

## Check for bugs when buying fresh porcini

When you buy or find fresh porcini, one of your main concerns is the many porcini-loving insects (which I'll call "boletivores") that invariably lay their eggs on the mushroom. The incubation period for the eggs is between 16 and 48 hours. It's difficult to just look at a mushroom and detect insects. The stem will give when squeezed if a significant amount of flesh

inside has been consumed, but otherwise you can't tell from the outside how many wigglies might be in the mushroom. If in doubt, ask the vendor to slice the mushrooms you select in half lengthwise.

As unappetizing as they are, insect larvae pose no threat to human health

that I know of. I'm sure many are inadvertently consumed by the unwary.



*A look inside a fresh porcini by author Jon Rowley and a vendor at Seattle's Pike Place Market.*



A fragrant dusting of dried porcini powder gives a deep and smoky accent to sautéed halibut.

## A guide to buying the best dried porcini



The quality of dried porcini sold in this country is uneven, so to help you make a smart purchase, here are a few pointers:

- ◆ Large pieces are usually preferable to small.
- ◆ The darker the color,

the more intense the flavor (usually), and the more judicious you'll need to be when adding the soaking liquid to recipes. Extremely dark porcini may be older and unpleasantly strong.

- ◆ Whatever the color, look for uniformity of color among pieces.
- ◆ Look for mostly cap pieces or a mix that has no more than 50% stem pieces, but avoid mixes with too many

pieces from large mature caps with predominantly dark green tubes.

- ◆ Avoid porcini with lots of tiny holes (evidence of prior extensive larvae habitation).
- ◆ Smell before you buy, if possible. The aroma should be deep, rich, pleasant, and inviting.
- ◆ Look for the Latin name (*Boletus edulis*) on the package, which should guarantee that they're the real thing.

Another delicious and versatile condiment is porcini-flavored oil. I make it using a very simple method: slip about an ounce of dried porcini pieces into a 16-ounce bottle of extra-virgin olive oil and then wait. The flavor develops slowly; my last batch took about two weeks. For a different method, see the recipe for sautéed halibut with porcini powder and oil, below.

### Sautéed Fresh Porcini

This French recipe for fresh porcini, called *cèpes à la bordelaise*, was given to me by Julia Child, who got it from a classic French cookbook, *La Cuisine de Madame St-Ange*. Serves four as an appetizer.

**1 lb. fresh porcini, wiped clean with a soft cloth**  
**½ cup olive oil**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**  
**1 Tbs. unsalted butter**  
**2 Tbs. finely chopped shallot**  
**Squeeze of fresh lemon juice**  
**1 Tbs. finely chopped parsley**

Cut the porcini caps into ½-inch slices and chop the stems into small dice.

Heat the olive oil in a heavy frying pan. (Don't worry about the large amount of oil—you'll pour most of it off, but you need a lot to get the porcini properly browned.) When the oil is very hot (just starting to smoke a bit), add the caps in an even layer and fry until well browned, about 2 min. on each side. Turn the heat to low and cook another 4 to 5 min. until tender. Increase the heat to high, and give the slices a final sauté for 1 to 2 min. until they're crisp again, turning once. Transfer to a serving dish and season with salt and pepper.

Pour off all but 1 Tbs. of oil from the pan (if the oil seems burned, pour it all off and start with 1 Tbs. fresh oil), return the pan to high heat, and add the butter. When foaming, add the shallots and chopped porcini stems. Season with a little salt and pepper and sauté until lightly browned, about 1 min. Transfer to the cooked slices, squeeze on a little lemon juice, and sprinkle with parsley. Serve immediately, with toasted country bread.

### Halibut al Tabaccaio

(Halibut "tobacco style")

This recipe, by *Fine Cooking's* contributing editor Paul Bertolli, calls for powdered porcini, which can only be made in a very clean spice or coffee grinder. The powder is used to coat the fish before it's sautéed, and it turns the fish a deep tobacco brown, hence the name of the dish. Serves four.

**½ oz. dried porcini**  
**1¼ lb. fresh halibut (or fillets of Atlantic cod, true snapper, grouper, striped bass, or halibut)**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

(Ingredient list continues)



*¼ cup neutral-flavored cooking oil (such as canola or peanut)*

*Porcini Oil (see recipe at right)*

In a spice or coffee grinder, grind the porcini to a fine powder, rotating the grinder as you go so that all the porcini come into contact with blades. Pour the powder onto a plate.

Cut the fish into four equal portions and season on both sides with salt and pepper. Let stand for about 10 min. This allows the fish to “sweat,” as the salt draws moisture to the surface and makes it easier for the porcini powder to adhere to the fish.

Dredge the fish in the porcini powder, coating it heavily on all sides. (If you don’t use all the powder, seal the remainder in a jar or a plastic bag for later use.)

Warm the oil in a well-seasoned cast-iron or nonstick frying pan. Sauté the fish over medium-high heat until it yields easily to the

tip of a knife, 4 to 6 min. per side. Serve on warm plates with a wedge of lemon and about 1 Tbs. porcini oil (solids included).

### Porcini Oil

*Yields 2 cups.*

*1 oz. dried porcini*

*1 cup water*

*2 cups extra-virgin olive oil*

*½ tsp. salt*

In a small saucepan, combine the porcini and the water. Cook over high heat until all the water has evaporated. Reduce the heat to low, add the olive oil, and heat until the oil reaches 250°F; keep it at that temperature for 10 min.

Remove from the heat and let cool. Put the oil (including the mushrooms) and the salt in a blender and blend to a coarse purée.

Pour into a one-pint glass jar, let the oil

come to room temperature, and then seal the jar with a tight-fitting lid. Store the oil in a cool, dark place for several days before using. Refrigerated, the oil will keep for up to three months.

### Saffron Risotto with Dried Porcini

*Fine Cooking* contributing editor Paul Bertolli, who created this recipe, recommends a rich poultry stock made from turkey. *Serves six to eight.*

*1 oz. dried porcini*

*2 qt. rich poultry stock*

*5 Tbs. unsalted butter*

*1 medium yellow onion, chopped fine*

*1 pinch saffron (about 30 threads)*

*2 oz. pancetta (unsmoked Italian bacon), sliced ⅛ inch thick and then diced*

*2 cups canaroli or arborio superfino rice*

*¾ cup dry white wine*

## The pleasures (and cautions) of mushroom foraging



*Picking your prize. Finding a porcini gives a special satisfaction. Foraging for wild mushrooms needs little equipment, good judgment (and good field guides), and lots of patience.*

If you know where to look, porcini can be found in many parts of North America in the late summer and fall, after rain. The first hard frost marks the definite end of the season. Where I live, in the Pacific Northwest, we’re blessed with two porcini seasons—once in the spring at the tail end of the morel season, on the eastern slopes of the Cascades, and again after rain in the fall on the western slopes.

Picking wild mushrooms would be a risky proposition if one were to eat every mushroom encountered—a few are fatal. Approached cautiously and responsibly, however, wild-mushroom foraging is as low-risk as buying

wild mushrooms in a package, and it’s infinitely more satisfying.

The cardinal rule is to never eat a wild mushroom that hasn’t been positively identified. Fortunately for the cook, porcini are among the easiest and safest to identify. The first step to becoming a self-sufficient forager is to obtain good field guides. I advise using at least three field guides, one of which must be specific to your region. The next step is to join a local mycological society. This will take ten years off the learning curve, I assure you. You’ll receive a newsletter, can take identification classes, and go on mushroom forays with experts.

#### FIELD GUIDES:

*Mushrooms Demystified* (2nd ed.), David Arora, 1986, Ten Speed Press.

*The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Mushrooms*, Gary H. Lincoff, 1981.

#### RECOMMENDED READING:

*Mushroom: The Journal of Wild Mushrooming* (published quarterly), Mushroom, 861 Harold, Moscow ID 83843.

#### FOR REFERRALS TO LOCAL MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY CHAPTERS:

North American Mycological Society, 3556 Oakwood, Ann Arbor, MI 68104.

Mycological Society of America, Room 329, BOIA, BARC-West, Beltsville, MD 20705.



*This risotto gets a double dose of porcini, with a mushroom-infused broth and dried porcini slices.*

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**½ cup freshly grated parmigiano-reggiano**  
**cheese**

In a medium saucepan, add the porcini to the poultry stock; bring it gently to a simmer, remove from the heat, and let stand until the porcini are tender and rehydrated, 8 to 10 min.—but not more than about 10 min., or the porcini will render all their flavor and taste bland in the rice. Strain, reserving both the porcini and the broth. Return the broth to the heat and bring it to a low simmer.

In a heavy, 6-qt. saucepan, warm 2 Tbs. of the butter, add the onions and saffron and cook until the onions begin to soften, about 5 min. Add the pancetta and cook for about another 3 min. Increase the heat and add the rice, stirring often to prevent it from sticking to the bottom of the pan and to make sure it is well coated with hot butter. When you notice the rice turning from opaque to shiny and translucent, add the wine. Let the wine reduce away, add the rehydrated porcini, and then add enough hot broth to just barely cover the rice, about 1½ cups. Stir well, reduce the heat, and simmer gently, stirring often.

Continue adding broth in ¼-cup increments as the rice begins to absorb it, keeping the risotto at a constant simmer and stirring often. Keep the level of the broth just above the rice.

After about 15 min., the rice will have lost most of its hard-kernel quality but will still be firm in the middle. Continue to cook for 3 to 5 min. more. Taste for texture; when it's still slightly chewy but yielding, add the remaining butter, and season with salt and pepper. (Remember when you add the salt that you'll later add cheese, another salty element.)

Finally, correct the consistency of the rice and surrounding liquid by adjusting the heat. The goal is to bring about a marriage of rice, broth, and the final addition of butter: the mixture should be nearly pourable, the whole reduced to the point that there is no separation between broth and rice. Serve at once in warm, wide bowls. Sprinkle with *parmigiano-reggiano* at the table.

*During the mushroom season, Jon Rowley, who has a food and restaurant consulting business in Seattle, is never quite out of the woods.* ♦



## Wine Choices

### Porcini work magic on wines—especially reds

*A wine that tastes fine by itself, and even better with beef or lamb, takes on extra layers of depth and complexity with an added morsel of meaty mushroom.*

**Sautéed Fresh Porcini.** This is a rather light treatment, and depending on what else you were serving, I could see either white or red wine in the glass. A light Sauvignon Blanc would be a good way to showcase the porcini, whose flavor is a bit more intense than that of the wine. What's more, the wine's light herbal tones would pick up on the herbs in the dish, and the lemon juice would match the wine's high acid.

If you'd rather highlight the wine, serve a light red instead: anything with low tannin and good acidity. A fresh, young Valpolicella or a Beaujolais, slightly chilled, would be a treat.

**Saffron Risotto with Dried Porcini.** If you can locate an older Italian red that has developed mushroomy flavors, this dish is an excellent excuse to open it and show it off. Otherwise, my top pick—given the pancetta—would be a Pinot Noir. Believe it or not, some of the fuller-bodied bottlings have flavors of bacon in the wine, as well as a rich, mushroomy earthiness, which will bring out the same qualities in both the wine and the food.

**Halibut al Tabaccaio.** This unusual preparation is one of those intriguing "borderline" dishes that work well with either red or white wine. In fact, you could put the "white wine with fish" dogma to the test by serving a glass of each and inviting your guests to talk about what they like and why.

The porcini powder enriches this recipe so dramatically that any white wine you serve has to be powerful. A big, creamy, oak-aged Chardonnay with good acidity would bring out the flavors of the dish while adding harmonious vanilla, butter, toasty, and even nutty flavors of its own.

For a red, keep it light: the fish is delicate to start with, and too much tannin in a wine can make fish taste unpleasantly fishy. Once again, I'd opt for a Pinot Noir to echo the earthiness of the porcini, but a lighter one this time to give the fish a chance to share the spotlight.

—*Rosina Tinari Wilson is a food and wine writer and teacher based in the San Francisco area. She is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.*



# Make Your Own Aromatic,

Turn leftover wine into high-quality vinegar with a few pieces of equipment and a little patience

BY PAUL BERTOLLI

I started making vinegar because I can't stand to throw anything away. Like most people who regularly drink wine, I often have an unfinished bottle. Rather than pour the wine down the drain, I decided to put it to use. I was thrilled to find a use for my leftover wine, but I was even happier to discover that the vinegar I made was better than the vinegar I could buy. The woody aroma of vinegar drawn fresh from the barrel has an unmistakable home-made quality that can't be matched by commercially made vinegar.

Making vinegar at home is simple. While it does take time to produce good vinegar, there isn't much actual labor. The process consists of four basic steps:

- ◆ preparing the starter,
- ◆ acidulating and diluting the basic vinegar stock,
- ◆ fermenting, and
- ◆ bottling and aging.

**As you accumulate unfinished bottles of wine, transfer the wine to smaller bottles, fill them to the top, and keep them tightly corked until ready to use.** If you're in a hurry to start making vinegar, simply buy the wine you need rather than saving up old bottles, but remember, wine that's not suitable for drinking won't make a fine vinegar. Dry, full-bodied, fruity red wines such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Syrah, or Merlot are particularly good choices for red-wine vinegar. White- and rosé-wine vinegar may be made from any varietal.

Keeping records of your vinegar-making is a good idea. I maintain a log that contains the types of wine I used, basic measurements, the temperature at which my barrel was stored, the time it took to complete the process, and any other observations. The log has served me well as a reference for subsequent batches.

## AN OAK BARREL FOR BETTER FLAVOR

You can make vinegar in many types of containers, including a large glass bottle, a five-gallon carboy, or an unleaded ceramic crock, but if you want to produce





# Full-Bodied Vinegar

vinegar with the round flavor that wood imparts, an oak barrel is your first choice.

A brand-new oak barrel should be treated with soda ash and washed with citric acid before use. The merchant who sells you the barrel can recommend chemicals and proper treatment. If you use a barrel that previously held wine, make sure the barrel is clean and free of molds or other contaminants before you fill it with your vinegar stock. Steam-clean a small barrel by filling it with several changes of boiling water



Photo: Carl Duncan

Author Paul Bertolli keeps his barrel in a warm place (68° to 86°F) at a comfortable height so he can easily draw off vinegar.

and letting it stand for ten minutes between changes.

In order for the wine to become vinegar, air must be able to pass freely through the barrel. Some shops sell barrels already prepared for vinegar-making. Otherwise, you'll need to drill a few holes in your barrel before filling it (see diagram on p. 68). Tack some screening over the holes to keep insects out.

## VINEGAR NEEDS A MOTHER

Vinegar is made by exposing wine to bacteria that convert the alcohol to acetic acid. The best way to get the right bacteria into your wine is with a starter culture, known as a "mother." You can buy a vinegar mother from shops that sell winemaking supplies (see sources, p. 68). It's possible to make your own from a mix of wine, vinegar, and water, but it's a slightly tricky proposition. The right bacteria must be present in your vinegar or the environment in order to get the mother started; the mixture is also at risk from mold. If you want to try your own, mix equal parts of wine, vinegar, and spring or purified water (the chlorine or fluoride in tap water will curb fermentation) in a large bottle or crock. Cover with cheesecloth, store at 68° to 86°F until a pale white or translucent layer forms on the surface (three to four weeks). The amount of starter you make and use is not that important—a cup should be adequate to inoculate two gallons of vinegar stock.

When you're ready to fill the barrel, you'll need to make a vinegar stock—a combination of diluted wine and vinegar. Most wines have an alcohol level

## Mixing up a batch of vinegar stock

You'll need to fill your barrel two-thirds full of vinegar stock, and add the mother to that.

Vinegar stock is a combination of seven parts wine (diluted with water to 10% alcohol) plus one part vinegar.

To find out what one "part" is for your barrel, divide its total volume by 12.

The chart at right gives amounts (in parts) of wine, water, and vinegar needed for the most

common alcohol levels of wine.

### AN EASY EXAMPLE:

A three-gallon barrel (12 quarts) divided by twelve equals one quart, so one part equals one quart. If your wine has a 14% alcohol level, the chart indicates that you need five parts wine. Since one part in this example is one quart, you would need five quarts of wine, two parts (two quarts) water, and one part (one quart) vinegar.

### PROPORTIONS OF WINE, WATER & VINEGAR

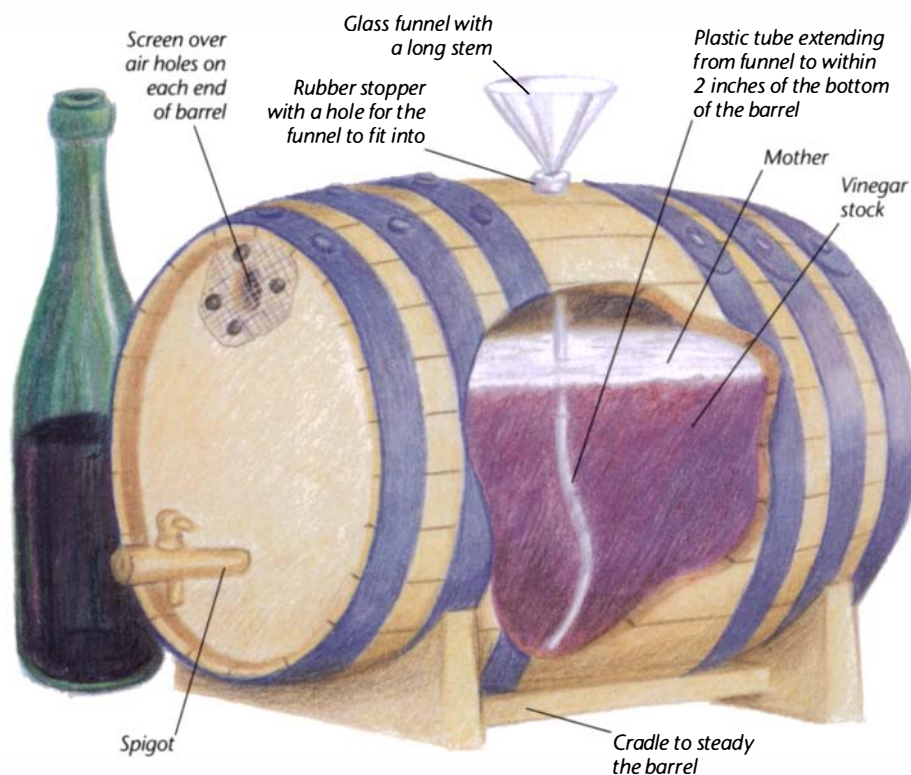
Alcohol level of wine	Amount needed in parts		
	Wine	Water	Vinegar
11%	6⅓	⅔	1
12%	5¾	1¼	1
13%	5⅓	1⅔	1
14%	5	2	1

Note: We've rounded off our chart to the nearest ¼ part. If you're making very large quantities of vinegar, you may want to be more accurate. To figure out how much wine to use, multiply the amount of diluted wine

you need by the desired alcohol concentration (10%), and then divide by the alcohol concentration of the wine. You can then subtract the wine amount from the total amount needed to find out how much water to use.



## MAKING A HOME FOR YOUR VINEGAR



*Prepare your barrel, pour in the ingredients, and wait. Fill the barrel with the vinegar stock (see sidebar p. 67) to about two-thirds of the barrel's total volume. (A wide surface area and adequate exposure to air are essential to the vinegar-making process.) Add the starter culture or mother—about one cup for two gallons of vinegar stock. Now all you do is wait.*

## Tips for successful vinegar

*Follow the simple directions in this article and you're not likely to encounter any difficulties. Still, there are a number of precautions to take and possibilities to look out for.*

◆ **No metals.** Don't let your vinegar come into contact with any metals, with the exception of high-grade stainless steel. This applies to any equipment, tools, or utensils. The acid in vinegar reacts with metals such as aluminum, copper, lead, zinc, and iron in a way that can discolor

your vinegar and affect its taste.

◆ **The right temperature.** Adjust and record temperatures as often as you can to maintain the optimal range (68° to 86°F). Temperatures that are either too high or too low can cause the fermentation cycle to slow down or cease altogether.

◆ **Keep the area around the barrel clean.** A dirty space may attract vinegar mites, which can spoil your vinegar.

◆ **Screen it.** Be sure the screening on the outside of the barrel is doing its

job of keeping flies from entering. Fruit flies can be a nuisance, particularly if their larvae find their way into your vinegar.

◆ **Watch the mother.** Over time, the mother may accumulate to the point that there's more of it than vinegar. If it does, empty the barrel, wash it well with boiling water, and begin again with a new starter and fresh vinegar stock.

◆ **Bottle it.** Bottling your vinegar cuts off the air supply, preventing the vinegar from over-oxidizing and becoming too harsh.

of about 12%, but acetobacters (the organisms that convert alcohol to acetic acid) work best in an alcohol concentration of 10%. To create an ideal environment for your vinegar, you need to dilute the wine before adding it to the barrel (for proportions, see the sidebar on p. 67). Alcohol concentrations higher than 15% will inhibit the growth of acetobacters and may even kill them. Check the wine label to find the alcohol level. If your wine is saved from many bottles, you can safely assume an average alcohol level of 12%. Use only spring water or purified water to dilute your wine.

Plan not to move or otherwise disturb the barrel. Movement tends to retard fermentation and may stir up the mother or the sediments from the wine. It may also cause the mother to sink. If the mother falls to the bottom of the barrel, the bacteria will continue using up nourishment and the vinegar process will be slowed because the bacteria can't oxidize alcohol in the absence of air.

**It takes anywhere from three to six months for wine to turn to vinegar.** You can detect how far along the vinegar is in its transformation by smelling it. Immature vinegar can be quite a shock to your nose, so don't just take a big sniff. Instead, pour the vinegar into a wineglass and swirl it gently. Hold the glass a few inches away from your nose and smell it. Uncompleted vinegar has predominant winy overtones. A gentle burn and round, woody aromas indicate that your vinegar is ready to use. When the vinegar suits your taste, draw off a portion and replace it with an equal amount of diluted wine. Draw the vinegar slowly from the spigot; likewise, when you replace the amount drawn, do so by gently and gradually pouring it through the funnel at the top of the barrel, taking care not to disturb the mother floating on top.

You can use the vinegar straight away or bottle it for further aging. Aging vinegar, like wine, will expand its aromas and temper its harshness. Fill and cork your bottles so that no air can further affect the fermentation. You will find a marked difference between a batch of freshly drawn vinegar and one that has been allowed to lie in the dark for several years to develop its complexity.

## SOURCES FOR VINEGAR-MAKING EQUIPMENT

**Oak Barrel Winecraft, Inc.,** 1443 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702; 510/849-0400.

**Milan Home Brew Shop,** 57 Spring St., New York, NY 10012; 800/233-7534.

**Wine Art,** 5890 North Keystone Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46220; 317/546-9940.  
**E.C. Kraus,** 9001 East 24 Highway, PO Box 7850, Independence, MO 64054; 816/254-7448.

*Paul Bertolli, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, stores his vinegar barrels in California's Napa Valley.* ◆



# Shop for Kitchenware Like a Pro

Restaurant-supply stores are treasure troves for home cooks, too

BY TONI LYDECKER

Even a home cook who's a cookware fanatic may never have thought to shop at a restaurant-supply store. Quite often these places are like old-fashioned hardware stores, with merchandise hidden away in drawers or storeroom boxes. Other restaurant-supply shops look reassuringly like retail kitchenware stores, complete with attractive displays and well-organized shelves. But a food mill the size of a small cement mixer and a customer asking for sanitizing liquid signal that this isn't your regular retail shop.

So should a home cook venture into professional territory? Actually, shopping at a restaurant-supply store is well worth the trouble for several reasons, including the durability of the merchandise, the competitive prices, and the availability of many specialized tools.

## HIGH-QUALITY GOODS, MADE TO LAST

Restaurant-supply stores sell merchandise sturdy enough to endure continuous use, and occasional abuse, in restaurants. While a home cook might use a stockpot once or twice a week, a commercial operation needs stockpots that can be left on the stove all day, every day.

Such durability is, of course, attractive to home cooks who want their equipment to last. Even the best of knives, cookware, and bakeware will expire after years of heavy commercial use. But as part of your home's *batterie de cuisine*, commercial-grade pots and pans should last a lifetime.

**Restaurant-supply stores generally have a great selection** and many items come in an astonishing array of sizes. You



can buy a ladle to dish up a dainty half-ounce or one that scoops a whopping 32 ounces. While you may not have a need for an oversized ladle, sometimes it makes sense for home cooks to think big. For instance, a 20-quart stockpot is a smart investment for anyone who makes large batches of stock to freeze. But be sure to check dimensions rather than just eyeballing cookware. Much of the equipment in these stores is outsized: a pot that seems to be only moderately large in the store showroom could turn into a cupboard-hogging monster once you get it home.

**Don't forget dishware.** Shopping for tabletop equipment is a possibility, too. Commercial-grade tableware can be

*Tools you can't find elsewhere. Restaurant-supply stores offer a wide selection of stock items that many consumer stores don't carry.*



*Don't be afraid to ask for help, says Jeffrey Lewis, manager of Empire Restaurant Supply in New York.*



warmed in the oven, thrown in the hottest dishwasher, and bounced off almost any floor except ceramic tile without so much as a chip. Glassware is equally indestructible. But many restaurant-supply stores require that you buy these items in quantity. To avoid breakage problems, many stores sell only full cases, which could translate into a minimum purchase of six dozen for some items.

### NOT ALL ITEMS ARE RIGHT FOR THE HOME COOK

Restaurant-supply stores aren't great for appliances—commercial-quality appliances tend to be too big, too specialized, or too costly for a home cook's needs. Philip Leggio, an owner of Westchester Restaurant Supply Company in Elmsford, New York, remembers a customer who was indignant to learn that the four-slice commercial toaster she had chosen cost \$400. "She thought I was trying to cheat her," he says. Yet, for a commercial customer, a toaster that can process hundreds of slices a day without burning out is worth every penny.

Even if the appliance is consumer-sized, there may be no advantage to buying it in a restaurant-supply store. Because retail stores sell more five-quart electric mixers than professional supply stores, their prices are likely to be the same or lower.

Despite its durability, professional cookware designed for the restaurant kitchen may not be the best for a home cook's needs. Often the choice of materials is limited—don't expect to find any beautiful matte black or highly polished finishes. Also, the variety of shapes and sizes is not likely to be as great for the restaurant kitchen. For instance, while your favorite retail store may sell five different kinds of omelet pan, each made of a different metal and some even lined with nonstick coating, a restaurant-supply store might only offer two choices.

### SHOPPING ETIQUETTE

To scout for restaurant-supply stores in your area, look under "Restaurant equipment and supplies" in the Yellow Pages (in some cities, they're listed only in the business-to-business directory). If the nature of the store isn't clear, call to make sure the "equipment" consists of small wares and tabletop items, not walk-in refrigerators and pizza ovens.

Because professional stores operate differently than retail cookware stores, you need to use the right shopping techniques. Jeffrey Lewis, manager of Empire Restaurant Supply on the Bowery in Manhattan, offers this advice: "If you're looking for something, you have to ask." He notices that retail customers often feel intimidated when

These places are like old-fashioned hardware stores, with merchandise hidden away in drawers or boxes.

## Special tools that a home cook will want

*Here are a just a few kitchen tools that might make a trip to a restaurant-supply store more than worth the effort.*

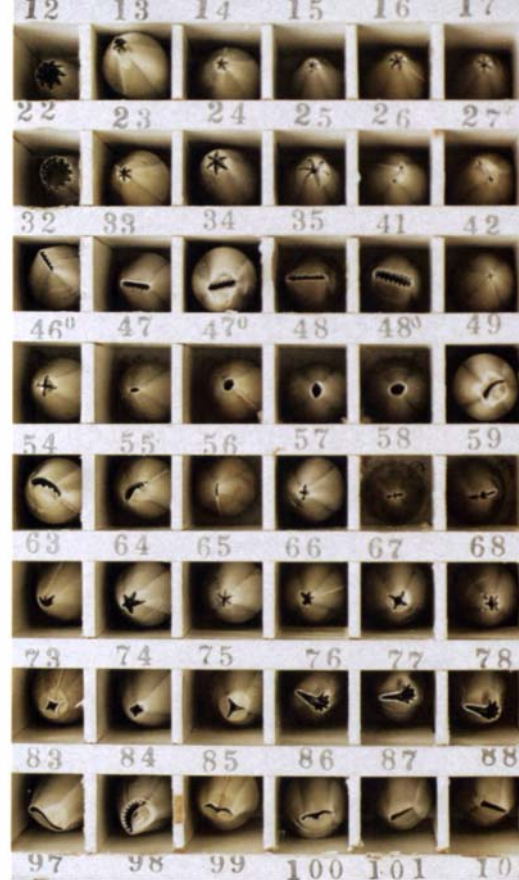
### Great kitchen tools

- ◆ heavy-duty stockpots
- ◆ whisks in every size and shape
- ◆ ladles in every size
- ◆ conical strainers (chinois) for sauces and stocks
- ◆ channel knives and other vegetable carving tools

- ◆ citrus zesters
- ◆ food mills
- ◆ heavy-duty meat pounders
- ◆ extra-large cutting boards
- ◆ instant-read thermometers

### Special items for bakers

- ◆ cake-decorating turntables
- ◆ rolls of parchment
- ◆ pastry bags with dozens of decorating tips
- ◆ bench knives (pastry scrapers)
- ◆ heavy-duty sheet pans
- ◆ false-bottom tart pans
- ◆ heavy-duty springform pans
- ◆ bowl scrapers
- ◆ marzipan sculpting tools



*Need a tip? Most restaurant-supply stores offer a huge range of pastry tips, bags, pans, and other baking and pastry equipment.*







*Take your pick of strainers. The perforated models (far left and far right) are good for all-purpose duty; the conical strainers (middle) are for sauces.*



*Keep an eye out for sturdy food mills like these. Their heavy gauge metal and interchangeable disks make them a pleasure to use.*

*Commercial cookware is built to last. Roasting pans that are meant to take daily abuse from professional chefs will last a lifetime in a home kitchen.*

they walk into the small, seemingly disorganized store, and leave without saying a word if they can't spot the item right away.

**Arrive equipped with sizes and other specifications.** If an item is esoteric or goes by several names, bring a photo or sketch. Two excellent illustrated sources are *The Well-Tooled Kitchen*, by Fred Bridge and Jean F. Tibbetts (WILLIAM MORROW, 1992. ISBN 0-688-12064-4) and *The Kitchenware Book*, by Steve Ettlinger (MACMILLAN, 1992. ISBN 0-02-536302-6).

**Work on the relationship,** just as you would with a butcher. If you have a lot of questions, wait until there's a lull in business. The same is true when asking about something not in stock. The salesperson almost surely has a cache of catalogs containing the very item you want, but he or she will be less willing to leaf through them all if regular customers are waiting impatiently.

**Ask about pricing.** Many restaurant-supply stores give a price break (20% is typical) to trade customers. Westchester Restaurant Supply gives the same price to retail customers, according to owner Leggio, as long as they are "buying correctly" in required quantities. The store also gives a 5% discount to culinary students, its future customer base. Also, be sure to check on the return policy, which may be different from that of a consumer-oriented store. A customer who places a special order at a restaurant supplier and then returns the merchandise might have to pay a restocking charge as high as 25%.

Consider doing bulk buys with friends, as you would at a food co-op, when it would mean a deeper discount or when it's the only way to meet a quantity requirement.

**Eavesdrop on trade customers.** If you're cooling your heels while a chef or restaurateur gets all the attention, relax and listen. You might get a free lesson on the finer points of professional equipment.

*Toni Lydecker is a food writer and an avid home cook who can't resist bargain-hunting among the restaurant-supply stores in and around New York City. ♦*



# Crunchy Baskets for Serving *and* Eating

*Add some crunch to your Chinese cooking. This delicate, crisp basket, made from dumpling wrappers, is quick and easy to make.*

Turn plain noodles and dumpling wrappers into delicious deep-fried serving pieces

BY LILY LOH

One of my favorite ways to present a Chinese dish is to serve it in a graceful, edible basket. These crisp, crunchy containers blend form and function by soaking up some of the dish's sauce, and they're a traditional way to present stir-fried dishes.

## SIMPLE EQUIPMENT, SIMPLE INGREDIENTS, BEAUTIFUL RESULTS

Baskets can be made with a variety of starchy ingredients; here I've used dumpling wrappers to create a beautiful platter of flower petals, and strands of woven noodles to make a lacy basket. These baskets can be made ahead of time and then warmed in a 300°F oven for five

minutes just before serving.

**The strainer sets the shape.** There are two types of Chinese strainers that make deep-frying the baskets much easier: a traditional strainer made of brass wires with a bamboo handle, and one made of stainless steel with holes punched in it. Just about any metal strainer will work, but keep in mind that the shape of your strainer will be the shape of your basket.

**A wok is the perfect vessel** for deep-frying these baskets. Its contoured shape gets hot quickly and provides the maximum surface area for frying.

**Use lots of fresh oil.** To ensure that the baskets cook quickly and evenly,

have enough oil in the wok to cover the basket completely. The more oil you use, the more constant the temperature will be, and the faster the basket will cook. Peanut, corn, and vegetable oils all have high smoking points and are good choices for deep-frying. Whichever oil you use, be sure it's fresh so it can tolerate high heat.

**Choose your noodle.** Ordinary dried spaghetti will make a great basket, but if it's authenticity you're after, use the long, dried wheat noodles that can be found in most Chinese markets. The Chinese noodles taste about the same as spaghetti, but they tend to stick together better when fried. You'll need

## MAKING A PASTA BASKET



**1** Loop strands of pasta into a strainer to create a delicate basket. Use ordinary cooked and drained spaghetti or angel hair pasta. To free both your hands, rest the strainer over a bowl.



**2** A few extra strands on the bottom make a sturdier basket. Once you've finished the pattern, close any large gaps between strands—they'll be more noticeable once the basket is cooked.



**3** To hold the noodles in place, put a second strainer (the same size or slightly smaller) inside the first one. Plunge the strainers into the hot oil. These baskets take less than five minutes to cook.



Photo: Beth Galtion

about a quarter pound of dried noodles or spaghetti for each nine- or ten-inch-diameter basket.

I use thin, round dumpling wrappers, called *gyoza*, to make a petal-shaped basket (see photo above). Dumpling wrappers can be found in most supermarkets—look in the produce department or in the refrigerated section. Don't confuse them

with square-shaped wonton wrappers, which are often much thinner. You'll need about fifteen dumpling wrappers to make each large basket.

#### IS THE OIL HOT YET?

Many Chinese cooks use the "chopstick test" to decide when the oil is hot enough for deep-frying. Poke a dry, wooden chop-

stick into the oil; if the oil foams, it's hot and ready for frying. If the oil is too cool, the noodles will absorb too much oil, and the basket will be greasy.

*Lily Loh is the author of Lily Loh's Chinese Seafood & Vegetables. She also teaches cooking classes in Solana Beach, California, where she lives. ♦*



**4** When the noodles turn golden brown, take the strainers out of the oil. Pour off the oil and set the strainer on paper towels to drain. Use a metal spatula to loosen the basket while it's still hot; it will be more difficult to remove if it cools first.



**5** Cooled baskets stay crisp for several hours. To serve warm, reheat the baskets in a 300°F oven for five minutes. Traditionally used to serve stir-fries, these baskets can be filled with almost any sauté or light stew.

#### MAKING A GYOZA BASKET



Lay round dumpling wrappers in an overlapping pattern, starting at the center and working out in circles. Brush the wrappers with a loose mixture of cornstarch and water to seal. Continue with steps 3 to 5 at left to fry the basket.



# Sweet Variations on Simple Sabayon

With just eggs, sugar, and wine, you can create an elegant, pudding-like dessert in five minutes



*An elegant make-ahead dessert. Serve chilled lemon sabayon sandwiched between shortbread cookies and paired with blueberry sauce.*

**L**earning to make sabayon means never having to say you're sorry about having no dessert to offer your guests. To make this warm, rich, pudding-like dessert, you need just three ingredients—eggs, sugar, and wine—are almost always on hand.

Sabayon originated in northern Italy, where it's called *zabaglione* and is traditionally made with Marsala wine. But sabayon, the French name for the dessert, can be prepared with a variety of wines or other liquids, making it quite versatile. There's just one caveat: to get the right texture—thick but light and frothy—you must cook sabayon carefully.

The classic sabayon is prepared at the last minute. At some restaurants, a well-trained staff member prepares it tableside, whisking the ingredients together in a copper pan over a small flame. Though you don't need the fanfare, you do need to serve your sabayon immediately after cooking it because it won't hold long. If this immediacy intimidates, you can prepare a chilled sabayon that will hold for hours in the refrigerator. But to make a chilled sabayon, you must first make the classic warm one. (Follow the methods on pp. 76–77.)

**The equipment needed to make sabayon is minimal.** I prefer to use a light whisk with many wires; the wires help incorporate the air into the sabayon, and the light weight lets me lift the whisk out of the bowl—another way to bring in air—without getting tired.

An unlined copper bowl is traditionally used because it heats evenly, but I've always used a stainless-steel bowl, and it works just fine. You'll set the bowl over a saucepan of simmering water, so choose a bowl and saucepan that fit together well. You want the most surface area of the bowl exposed to the water below, but the bowl shouldn't actually touch the water. If your bowl moves around too much, put a thin, wet towel between the saucepan and the bowl to help keep the bowl in place.

#### VARIATIONS ON A SABAYON THEME

I learned to appreciate sabayon's versatility during my stint as a pastry chef at Arrows restaurant in Ogunquit, Maine, where the desserts change daily. Here are some ideas for variations.

**Change the liquid, change the flavor.** Replace the Marsala with Champagne or Grand Marnier and you get a completely different dessert. Use less liquid if it has a strong flavor. If you're using an especially sweet liquid, such as port, cut back a little on the sugar.

You can also try citrus juices instead of alcohol. I especially like fresh lemon juice. To mellow its



*Champagne retains its sparkle in a sweet sabayon. Spoon chilled Champagne sabayon over fresh berries for a dramatic and refreshing combination.*

tartness, I whisk in some butter as a final step (see recipe on p. 76).

**Chilled sabayon lasts longer and tastes lighter.** Though sabayon is easy to make, there are times when you don't want to leave anything to chance. That's where chilled sabayon comes in. Simply cool the sabayon over a bowl filled with ice and fold in whipped cream (see method on p. 77).

**Chilled is cool, but so is hot.** Sabayon gratinée was always a hit at Arrows. Layer warm sabayon over fresh fruit—berries work especially well—and toasted nuts, if you like. Sprinkle the sabayon with a little sugar and heat under a broiler until the sugar begins to brown. The sugar forms a thin, crisp layer over the sabayon. For an even richer dessert, try my Baked Chocolate Sabayon (recipe on p. 77), which looks like a soufflé. You can top it with ice cream, whipped cream—or perhaps a chilled sabayon.



# Making the classic sabayon



**1** *Sabayon begins with egg yolks.*  
Pour the yolks into a stainless-steel or copper bowl that's been cleaned of any green oxide. Add the sugar, a little at a time. Whisk the yolks and sugar until the mixture is light in color and air has been incorporated. Add the wine.



**2** *A double boiler beats the heat.*  
Bring some water to a simmer in a saucepan. Set the bowl over the water, but make sure it doesn't touch the water or you'll end up with scrambled eggs. To ensure a smooth, light texture, whisk continuously throughout the cooking process.



**3** *Strive for ribbons, avoid lumps.*  
Whisk until the sabayon becomes frothy and thick, scraping the sides and bottom of the bowl. Remove the sabayon from the heat just as ribbons start to trail off the whisk. Continue to whisk for another minute to help set the sabayon. Serve immediately.

## Don't overcook

*Overcooked sabayon can't be saved. Either this sabayon was cooked too long, or the heat was too high. You want to heat the yolks enough to make the eggs' proteins bond—but not into a solid mass.*



## Classic Marsala Sabayon

This sweet dessert also goes by the name *zabaglione*.  
*Yields 4½ cups; serves six (with fruit, serves eight).*

*8 large egg yolks*  
*½ cup sugar*  
*½ cup Marsala wine*

Bring a saucepan of water to a simmer. In a large stainless-steel or copper bowl, whisk the egg yolks and sugar

together quickly and thoroughly. Stir in the wine. Set the bowl over the simmering water. Continue to whisk briskly until the mixture is thick and frothy, about 5 min. Remove from the heat, whisk gently for 1 min., and serve.

## Chilled Champagne Sabayon

This is my favorite sabayon. You don't need expensive Champagne to get great results. *Yields 6 cups; serves eight.*

*8 large egg yolks*  
*½ cup sugar*  
*¾ cup Champagne*  
*1 cup heavy cream, whipped to soft peaks*

Follow the method for classic sabayon (above), and then continue with the method for chilled sabayon (at right).

## Chilled Lemon Sabayon

To enjoy this sabayon warm, serve it after the butter has been incorporated. Try the chilled version with Chilled Blueberry Sauce and Shortbread Cookies (recipes at right). *Yields 5¼ cups; serves six to eight.*

*4 large eggs*  
*4 large yolks*  
*Juice from 4 lemons (about 1 cup)*  
*¾ cup sugar*  
*4 oz. (8 Tbs.) room-temperature butter, cut into small pieces*  
*½ cup heavy cream, whipped to soft peaks*

Follow the method for classic sabayon (above), adding the whole eggs along with the egg yolks, sugar, and lemon juice.

After you've taken the sabayon from the heat and whisked another minute, gently whisk in the butter a little at a time until it's completely incorporated. If the butter melts immediately, stop adding it and whisk the sabayon a little longer to cool it to tepid. Continue with the method for chilled sabayon (above right).



*A sabayon can stand on its own. The classic is made with Marsala wine and served warm.*

## Two steps to chilled sabayon

### Chilled Blueberry Sauce

This sauce pairs well with the Chilled Lemon Sabayon, but you can use it to top any chilled version. If you use frozen blueberries, decrease the water to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup. *Yields  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups.*

***$2\frac{1}{2}$  cups fresh blueberries (or frozen, thawed, and drained)***  
***1 Tbs. water***  
 ***$\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar***  
***2 tsp. lemon juice***

Combine 1 cup of the blueberries, the water, sugar, and lemon juice in small, nonaluminum saucepan. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until the sugar has dissolved and mixture is boiling, about 4 min. Remove from the heat. Stir in the remaining blueberries. Refrigerate for 3 to 24 hours. Serve well chilled.

### Shortbread Cookies

*Yields 16 cookies.*

***9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour***  
 ***$2\frac{1}{4}$  oz. ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup) confectioners' sugar***  
 ***$\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. salt***  
***8 oz. (16 Tbs.) unsalted butter cut into small pieces, kept cold***

Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with foil or kitchen parchment.

In an electric mixer, combine the flour, sugar, and salt; mix 30 seconds to blend. Add the butter and blend on a slow speed until the dough just comes together, about 2 min.

Roll out the dough about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick on a lightly floured surface. (If the dough is too sticky, refrigerate it for 30 min. before continuing.) Stamp out eight cookies with a 3½-inch round cookie cutter; arrange the rounds on a baking sheet 1½ inches apart. Chill the dough scraps until ready to use for a second batch. Bake the cookies until the edges are lightly browned, about 12 to 14 min. Remove from oven; let sit 3 min., and then carefully transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. Repeat with the leftover dough to make eight more cookies.

### Baked Chocolate Sabayon

You can chill the cooked sabayon for up to 1½ hours before the final baking. If you do, add 5 minutes to the baking time. *Yields 4 cups; serves eight.*

***7 large eggs***  
***3 large egg yolks***  
 ***$\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar***  
***2 Tbs. dark rum***  
***4 oz. bittersweet chocolate, chopped fine (about  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup)***

Heat oven to 375°. Follow the method for classic sabayon (at left). Take the sabayon off the heat and gently whisk in the chocolate. Divide the warm sabayon among eight 4-oz. ovenproof ramekins or molds. Bake until the sabayons are puffed and the sides are springy when lightly touched, about 12 to 14 min. (The center should still be soft; it will jiggle slightly when shaken.) Serve immediately.

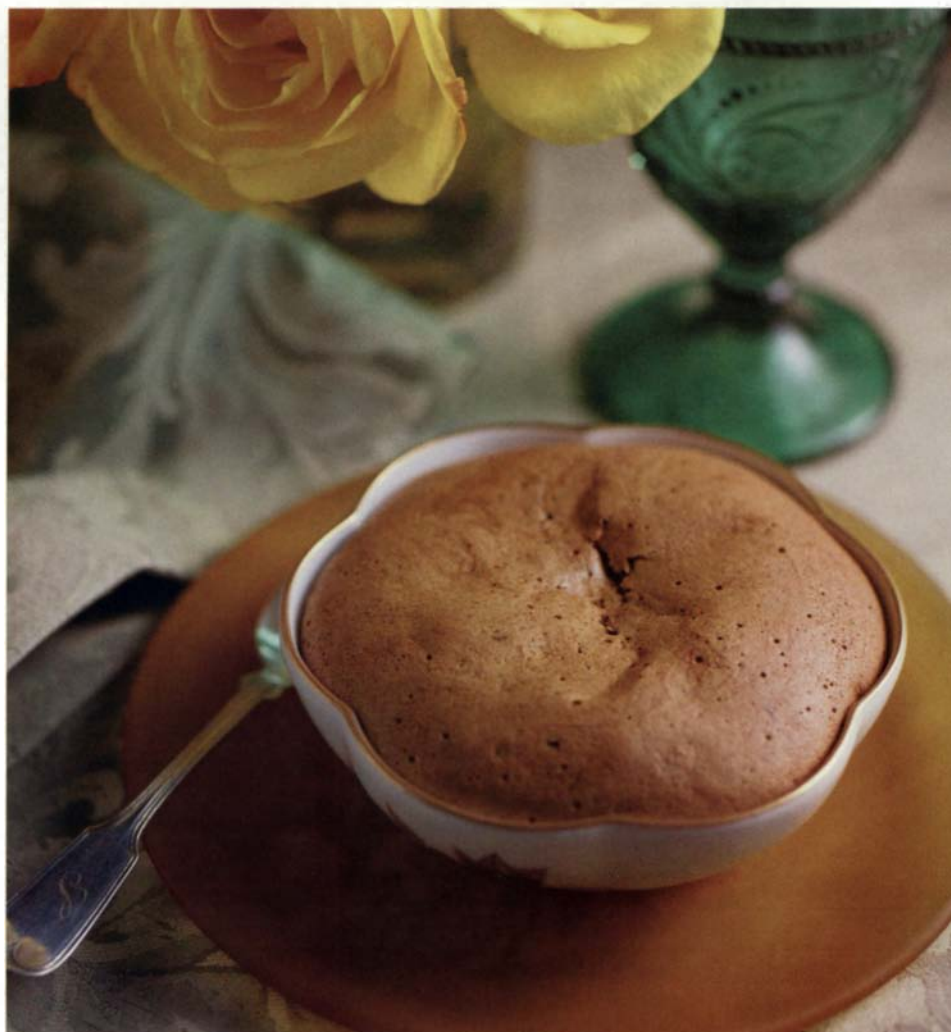
*A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America's Baking & Pastry Program, Bernice Fehringer is the cake decorator at Chew Chew Bakery in Northport, Long Island. ♦*



**1** *Have a big bowl of ice ready. Set the bowl of warm sabayon on the ice. Whisk the sabayon over the ice periodically for about ten minutes. Quick cooling keeps bacteria at bay and allows you to add the whipped cream with no danger of curdling the cream.*



**2** *Whipped cream lightens the sabayon's taste and texture. Gently fold cream that has been whipped to soft peaks into the chilled sabayon. Refrigerate at least 1½ hours before serving. A chilled sabayon can hold up to 24 hours, but it's best served the same day.*



*Baked sabayon has a pudding-like middle. Top it with ice cream—or another sabayon.*



## How to cook pasta to perfection



*Dried pastas come in a remarkable range of shapes; each one needs a slightly different cooking time.*



*Pasta before and after boiling. During cooking, pasta swells to more than double its volume.*

Anyone who has ever sat down to a plate of mushy spaghetti, or almost broken a tooth on overly *al dente* ziti knows that there's more to cooking pasta than just boiling water.

**Start with a high-quality product.** Look for fresh or dried pasta made with 100% hard durum wheat (sometimes called semolina). Particularly high in protein, durum wheat gives pasta the gluten it needs to hold its shape in boiling water.

Fresh pasta absorbs more flavor from a sauce, but for my taste, its soft texture doesn't have enough character or body. I prefer the firmer texture of dried pasta for most recipes. Dried pasta is also more convenient, and it comes in an endless variety of shapes.

When cooked, dried pasta doubles or triples in volume depending on the shape; fresh

pasta usually swells to a little over twice its original volume. Figure on  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound dried pasta, or about  $\frac{1}{3}$  pound fresh, for each main-course serving.

**Plenty of rapidly boiling water is the key to cooking pasta.** Pasta releases a lot of starch as it cooks. If there isn't enough water in the pot, that starch will remain quite concentrated, making for some sticky pasta. Also, the vigorous action of a large amount of boiling water keeps the pasta moving around the pot so it cooks evenly and doesn't stick together.

Use 4 quarts of water for each pound of pasta, adding another quart for each additional  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound. Many cooks add oil to the water thinking that it will prevent gummy pasta. This is not true. The oil simply floats on top of the water and has little effect on the pasta itself. Oil will help keep the water from foaming, but it's by no means necessary.

*Al dente describes pasta that's tender yet still firm to the bite—but not chalky.*

When the water comes to a boil, add salt—about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons for each gallon of water. Well-salted cooking water is essential. Without enough salt, the pasta will taste flat, and you can't correct the seasoning once the pasta has been cooked.

After you've salted the water and it has returned to a full boil, add the pasta all at

once. Stir immediately and again every few minutes to prevent clumping. Cooking time depends on the shape, amount, and quality of the pasta you're cooking. Most fresh pasta and the very thinnest dried noodles will be done almost as soon as the water returns to a boil. Thick pastas, such as penne, may take 10 to 12 minutes. Use the cooking times recommended on the package only as a guide: they often result in overcooking.

**The way to test for doneness is to taste—and taste often.** Use a fork or a wooden spoon to retrieve a piece of pasta and take a bite. If there's still a bit of chalky whiteness at the center, it isn't quite done. Wait a minute and taste again. When the white center is gone, the pasta is completely cooked through. Italians use the term *al dente*—literally, “to the tooth”—to describe pasta that's tender yet still firm to the bite.

If the pasta will be cooked further, as for lasagna and other baked pasta dishes, you'll want to boil it until it's soft but still slightly underdone. You can bake it to perfect doneness once it has been combined with the remaining ingredients.

**When the pasta is done, dump the water pronto.** Remove the pot from the heat and drain immediately. Never let pasta sit in its cooking water: it will absorb water like a sponge and turn to mush. Shake the colander to remove any excess water and then toss the pasta immediately with your sauce. If you plan to use the pasta for a cold salad, rinse with cold water to stop it cooking any further and to wash away excess starch.

# Mastering vegetable cuts—julienne and brunoise

One remnant of my French culinary training is my preference for precision-cut vegetables. In this age of food processors, most of us rarely have the pleasure of picking up a knife and deftly cutting a neat dice, which cooks more evenly, and gives a dish a pretty, polished appearance.

## GET A HANDLE ON YOUR CUTTING TOOLS

When making precision cuts,

it's important to use a sharp knife. Dull knives not only produce rough-looking cuts, they're also dangerous. Let the blade do the work. If you find yourself pushing excessively hard to make a cut, your blade is too dull.

**Choose a good-size chef's knife.** Grip the knife handle securely, but not so tightly that your knuckles turn white. Don't hold your index finger along the top of the knife.

Some chefs find it more comfortable to move their hand further up the handle and hold the base of the blade between the index finger and thumb, gripping the handle with the back three fingers.

Use your other hand to hold the food you're cutting. Always keep your fingertips curled back and your thumb tucked underneath (as in the photos below)—an extended finger is an invitation for an accident. Use your knuckles as a guide for the blade; they should retreat as the blade advances. Getting comfortable with this technique will make

your knifework both easier and more precise.

## SLENDER SHAPES: JULIENNE AND BATON

Although you probably don't work with a ruler in your kitchen, a true julienne (also called a matchstick) measures exactly  $\frac{1}{8} \times \frac{1}{8} \times 2$  inches. A similar but larger cut is called a baton.

A carrot, with its fairly regular shape, is a good vegetable for practicing your precision cutting. First cut it into 2-inch-long sections. Then trim each section to make a rectangular block (save the trimmings for stocks, soups, or nibbling). Next, slice the block into even  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch slices. Stack two or three of these slices together and cut again into  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch sticks. The slices tend to slip under the pressure of the knife, so hold them securely.

Vegetables that don't slice into neat slabs, such as leeks and scallions, can simply be cut into even lengths, turned lengthwise, and sliced into  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch strips. They won't be as square as denser vegetables but they're quite pretty and delicate.

## SQUARE SHAPES: BRUNOISE AND DICE

A brunoise—tiny, regular  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch dice—is the cut to use for garnishing a delicate soup or a finely textured stuffing. I also use it as a whimsical, confetti-like decoration. To make a perfect brunoise (pronounced broo-NWAHZ), stack a small bunch of julienned vegetables together and cut across the ends to make a tiny, perfectly square dice. Use this same technique for a larger dice but start with a baton cut instead of a julienne.



**1** *Square off the sides of the vegetable to make a 2-inch-long rectangular section. You can save the trimmings to use in stocks or stews.*



**2** *Slice lengthwise into  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch slabs for julienne; larger for baton. Use a sharp knife, hold it securely, and slide the blade, don't force it.*



**3** *Stack a few slices and cut them into  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch strips for julienne; larger for baton. For even cuts, align the edges of the stack.*



**4** *Line up the strips for dicing. Use the knife blade to tap the julienne into alignment. Cut only a few sticks at a time; a larger pile may slip as you slice.*



**5** *Cut the julienne at even intervals ( $\frac{1}{8}$  inch for confetti-like brunoise). Use the hand holding the food as a guide, keeping fingertips tucked under slightly and away from the blade.*



**6** *Uniformly cut vegetables look neat and cook evenly. Clockwise from top left: dice, baton, julienne, and brunoise.*



## Keeping food flavorful and safe during freezing



*Avoid a freezer mystery by labeling and dating foods. If you have a lot of frozen food, make an inventory so you don't have to rummage around with the freezer door open.*

Once when scavenging for dinner at a friend's vacation home, we found some chicken in the freezer and planned a barbecued chicken dinner. As the poultry thawed, the smell of sour meat told us that we'd be eating only salad and potatoes that night. My friend seemed surprised to learn that meat and fish could spoil in the freezer. But sadly, the freezer is not a magic chamber where time stands still forever.

Although bacteria can't grow when frozen, enzymes are still at work, destroying the quality of frozen meat and fish by causing fats to oxidize and turn rancid. Foods with a high fat content spoil more quickly. The type of fat also makes a difference: saturated fats are more stable than unsaturated, so beef (which is high in saturated fat) will last up to four times longer than fish (which is high in unsaturated fats).

### HOW COLD IS FROZEN?

For maximum freezer shelf life, you need a freezer that

holds food at a constant temperature of 0°F or below. If you're unsure about the temperature of your freezer, test it with a freezer thermometer.

Some home freezers can maintain this temperature, but many don't. Among the freezers that don't are those inside the refrigerator, often called "ice-cube compartments." These generally hold a temperature between 10° and 25°. Also be aware that opening the refrigerator frequently causes fluctuations in this type of freezer's temperature and accelerates food spoilage. In general, ice-cube

compartments are not intended to store perishable meats and fish for any length of time. Meat stored in this type of freezer should be used within two months and fish within three weeks.

If you're serious about stocking up, consider investing in a free-standing freezer with its own temperature setting and a tight door seal. These freezers hold constant temperatures of 0° or below, and store foods safely for much longer periods. Beef stored at 0° can last up to eight months.

### WRAP FOODS TIGHTLY TO PRESERVE FLAVOR

If you're freezing meat yourself, start with the freshest product, trim off excess fat, and then wrap the meat

**The freezer is not a magic chamber where time stands still.**

tightly in good-quality freezer paper. Heavy-duty plastic bags will work, but be careful not to puncture the plastic with sharp bones. A moisture-proof wrap will protect the food from the drying air of the freezer and prevent the con-

dition known as "freezer burn." The flimsy plastic film on fresh meat from the market is not adequate for extended freezer storage.

Wrap meats and fish in meal-size portions and always label and date each package. If you have a lot of food in your freezer, keep an inventory to help you figure out what's inside without having to fish around with the door wide open.

### BRING THE FOOD'S TEMPERATURE DOWN QUICKLY

The faster you freeze the food, the better the texture will be when you thaw it. Place new additions to the freezer against the walls or on the floor of the freezer, as these are the coldest areas. Keeping your freezer about two-thirds full will also increase efficiency, but don't add too much unfrozen food at once (no more than two pounds per cubic foot of freezer space). Never use your freezer to chill hot foods: this just raises the temperature of the rest of the freezer's contents and creates a lot of frost.

Seasonings deteriorate when frozen, so any seasoned, processed, or cured meats or fish should be frozen only for a short time (one to two months). Pack leftover cooked meats and fish with some gravy or sauce to prevent drying, and keep them frozen for no more than two months.

Finally, refreezing deteriorates the texture of meat and fish. Be sure to get commercially frozen meat and fish home and into your freezer right away to avoid thawing.

—Molly Stevens, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, is a chef/instructor at the New England Culinary Institute, in Essex, Vermont. ♦

### APPROXIMATE SHELF LIFE OF MEATS AND FISH HELD AT 0°F OR BELOW

Type of food	Expected shelf life
Beef, lamb, veal	8 months
Pork and chicken	6 months
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Note: For packages of meat or fish that weigh less than 1 pound, cut the expected shelf life in half



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| <b>1 lb. skinless, boneless chicken breasts, cut into strips</b>          | 1. In nonstick skillet over medium-high heat, stir-fry chicken in 2 batches until browned. Set chicken aside.  |
| <b>1 can Swanson® Oriental Broth</b>                                      | 2. Add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup broth and vegetables. Heat to a boil. Cover and cook 5 min. or until vegetables are tender-crisp.   |
| <b>5 cups cut-up vegetables (celery, broccoli, carrots, green onions)</b> | 3. Mix cornstarch and remaining broth. Add to pan. Cook until mixture boils and thickens, stirring constantly. Return chicken to pan. Heat. Serve over rice. Serves 4. |
| <b>2 tbs. cornstarch</b>  |  |

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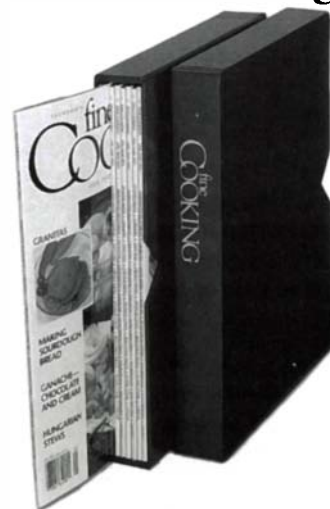
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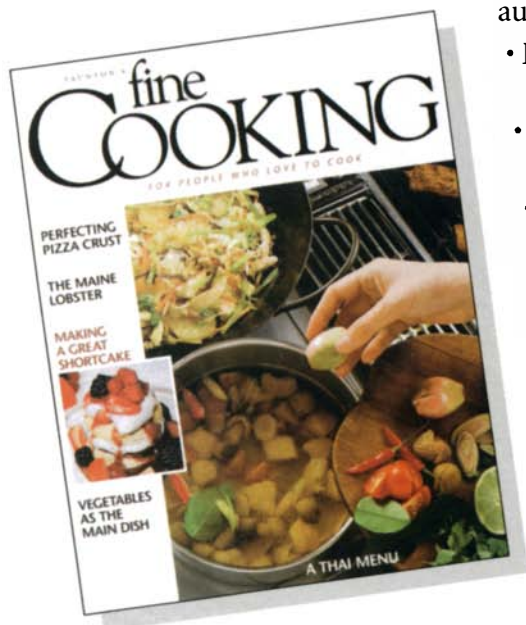
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**W**ith today's emphasis on low- and no-fat cooking, many people are looking for ways to cut back on their fat intake. The "visible fats"—such as butter, oil, vegetable shortening, and lard that you add to foods—are often the first to go, precisely because they are so visible.

Healthful eating is important, but fats do play vital roles in cooking. If you replace or eliminate them without understanding these roles, you'll end up with tough pastry, pallid chicken, and curdled sauces. Of course, you're sure to cut back on fat if you make food that's too unappetizing to eat, but who wants that? You can lessen the amount of fat used in many recipes, and you can cut it out completely from some, but

you can do it more successfully knowing the culinary purposes fats serve.

#### **FATS MAKE FOOD FLAVORFUL**

Aside from adding their own flavor to food, fats release and carry the fat-soluble flavors of other ingredients. Alcohol dissolves and carries some of these fat-soluble flavors, but fats also add to the overall taste experience by coating and moistening food, giving it a wonderful, satisfying "mouth-feel." Fat smooths a food's texture and hold its flavor for a lingering taste experience.

Without fat to release and carry them, a food's fat-soluble flavors will be imperceptible. To compensate, you can add more flavorful ingredients. Herbs, spices, vinegars,

# The Vital Roles of Fats in Cooking

By understanding how fats work, you can choose to cut them—or not

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER

*Fats do more than add calories—they make pastries light and tender, sautéed foods crisp and golden, sauces thick and satin-smooth. They also make food taste good.*

and citrus zest, for example, all add flavor without fat.

To get the best flavor out of a low-fat dish, however, use substitutes to perform some of the technical jobs of fat (which we'll get into next), and add just a little fat to carry the flavor. In her book *Chocolate & the Art of Low-Fat Desserts*, (Warner, 1994), Alice Medrich offers recipes for luscious low-fat desserts. She eliminates the fat where technically possible but still includes a small amount of high-quality (and high-fat) chocolate for its irreplaceable flavor.

#### **FATS LIGHTEN CAKES AND SHAPE COOKIES**

Perhaps you've wondered why so many cookie and cake recipes have you cream butter with sugar. In this step, the fat is a leavening agent. The action of the sharp edges of the sugar cutting into the solid fat helps create millions of tiny pockets of air that are later enlarged by the gases from baking powder or baking soda. These

bubbles are vital for a light, fine-textured product.

Other ingredients can replace fats in this role as long as they're thick enough to hold the air bubbles. Whipped egg whites or fruit purées mixed with some egg white are good candidates. Just remember that added egg whites don't necessarily replace the need for whole eggs in a batter. Without at least one yolk, the final product may be rubbery and dry.

**Fats tenderize by inhibiting gluten development.** When liquid is added to flour, the gluten-forming proteins in the flour link with the liquid and each other to form tough, elastic sheets of gluten. If you add solid fat to the flour before adding the liquid, as you do in making pie crusts, you coat the proteins and keep them from joining and making gluten.

Removing fat from baked goods can make them tough. Sugar, whether in the form of puréed fruit, honey, corn syrup, or granulated sugar, is an effective tenderizer. The gluten-forming proteins join with the sugar instead of each other, and less gluten is formed.

**Fats create spaces in flaky pastries**, such as croissants, puff pastry, and flaky pie crusts.

In these pastries, chilled fat is either cut into the dough, as in pie crust, or is incorporated into the dough through a sequence of layering and folding. If the fat is very cold, it holds its shape during baking just long enough for the dough to begin to set. The fat then melts, leaving spaces for steam from the dough to puff apart. For the most part, you're out of luck for a replacement for this very specialized role of fat in pastry.

**Fats influence the shape, texture, and taste of cookies.** Butter's sharp melting point causes butter in batter to melt quickly and spread, resulting in thin, crisp cookies. Shortening holds its shape up to a higher temperature and makes thicker cookies. But because shortening lacks butter's flavor, a mixture of the two tastes better than shortening alone.

Eliminating fats from cookies is difficult, especially if you want crisp cookies, which need a high proportion of fat. Chewy cookies take better to fat substitutions, such as fruit purées.

**FATS GIVE FOOD A GOLDEN BROWN CRUST** Compare a poached chicken breast with one sautéed in butter. Poached chicken is wan and bland; sautéed chicken

has an appetizing brown crust. The browning comes from carbohydrates and proteins in the chicken reacting with heat in what's known as the Maillard reaction. Similar to caramelization, the Maillard reaction causes browning and gives food sweet, rich flavors.

To achieve browning, food must be heated to over 300°F. Food that's poached, steamed, or boiled doesn't get hotter than water's boiling point of 212°, but food cooked in hot

fats is instantly surrounded by a medium that can reach 300° to 400°, depending on the fat used. Boiling and steaming may emphasize a food's natural flavor, but frying and sautéing can create crunchy crusts with intense flavors.

There is no substitute for fat as a fast, hot cooking medium. To mimic frying, you can coat food with crumbs and bake until browned, but the results are quite different from food that has been instantly surrounded by high-temperature fat.

Aside from adding flavor,

fats also keep food from sticking to the pan. Cooking sprays and nonstick pans prevent sticking but don't do much for flavor. Some recipes suggest sautéing food in a little water or chicken stock to keep the food from sticking, but this is actually steaming and produces no browning.

**FATS THICKEN SAUCES AND PREVENT CURDLING** Some classic sauces, such as *beurre blanc*, *hollandaise*, and

*béarnaise*, depend on fat emulsions for their texture. When tiny fat droplets are dispersed in water or tiny water droplets in fat, the emulsion is thicker than either the water or the fat. Even a small amount of butter or cream, which is mostly fat, whisked into a sauce just before serving will produce a slightly thicker consistency. Vegetable purées can replace fat as a thickener, but they don't carry flavor and don't contribute to mouth-feel the way that fats do.

Fats also help prevent cur-

dling, which is why sauces made with cream don't curdle, while those made with low-fat yogurt or milk do. When heated, the protein molecules in milk products unwind and seek to bond with each other. The many fat molecules in cream coat the few protein molecules as they unwind, keeping them from joining; that's why cream can boil and thicken without curdling. But with little fat available to coat the proteins, low-fat yogurt and milk curdle. To combat curdling in a low-fat "cream" sauce, add starch. Starch swells and gets in the way of the proteins and keeps them from joining.

Dietary fat also plays many roles in health. Too much fat causes heart disease, but fat also provides energy and carries fat-soluble vitamins and essential fatty acids. While it's a good idea to watch your fat intake, you need to balance your goals of being fit and eating well. In other words, leave the butter in the pie crust, but take a smaller piece of pie.

*Shirley O. Corriher, of Atlanta Georgia, teaches food science and cooking classes around the country. She is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦*

You can eliminate fat where technically possible, but include a little for flavor.

WHAT FATS DO IN COOKING		
<i>Role fat plays</i>	<i>What this means</i>	<i>Replacement possibilities</i>
Adds and carries flavors	Dissolves and carries flavor components of many foods; coats food, giving it a good mouth-feel	Strong nonfat flavorings such as spices, herbs, vinegars; alcohol also releases fat-soluble flavor components
Tenderizes baked goods	Cuts gluten development in flour	Sugar in any form
Leavens doughs and batters	When creamed with sugar, provides air pockets for gases to fill	Thick ingredients like egg whites and fruit pureés
Creates spaces in flaky pastry	Holds spaces between layers of dough	No real replacement
Shapes cookies	A fat with a low melting point makes cookies spread	No real replacement
Thickens sauces	Creates an emulsion with water	Vegetable purées
Prevents sticking	Coats pots and pans to keep food from sticking	Nonstick pans, cooking sprays
Conducts heat in frying and sautéing	Surrounds food with enough heat to brown it	No real replacement
Prevents sauces from curdling	Coats proteins to keep them from bonding	Starch, such as flour or cornstarch



# Delectable Essays on Eating

Six books that contemplate the pleasures of food

With the possible exception of fly-fishing, the pleasures of cooking and eating translate into literature more often and more happily than those of any other science, craft, or art. The best-loved works of the most celebrated American thinker on the topic, M. F. K. Fisher, combine history and memory as well as the occasional "receipt." Five of these early works (*Serve it Forth*, *Consider the Oyster*, *How to Cook a Wolf*, *The Gastronomical Me*, and *An Alphabet for Gourmets*) are collected in one volume, *The Art of Eating*.

Whether she's discussing oyster stew or Jell-O, Fisher's philosophy of life unifies her work, her conviction that it is

perhaps now-quaint specific suggestions for surviving World War II in *How to Cook a Wolf*, and underlies the essays in *Serve it Forth*. Here Fisher interweaves reminiscences of early married eating in Dijon and musings on the "social status" of vegetables, among other things, with informal historical surveys of food fashions from the classical world to the Renaissance. Examples include the "shopping list" for a weekend hunting party chez Richard II (50 swans, 110 geese, and 50 good capons, as a start).

Fisher herself insists, however that "there are two kinds

Liebling believes that with a little more gustatory stimulus than that cookie, Proust might have written a masterpiece.

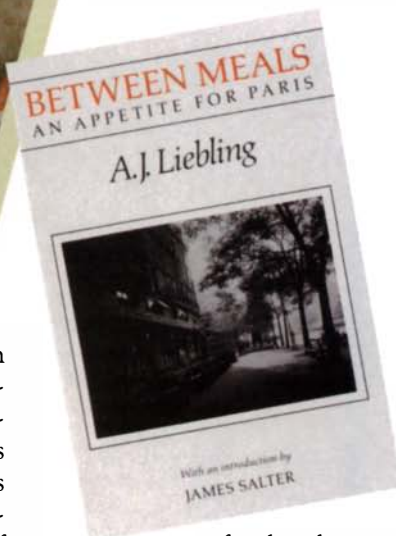
possible, if not imperative, to feed oneself honestly and with dignity, to eat thoughtfully, even (and especially) when alone or in the face of deprivation. This theme dignifies the

of books about eating; those that try to imitate Brillat-Savarin's and those that try not to." Her book, she hopes, will merely be "haunted" by "that great ghost born in Belley who

ate like a fat person and wrote consummately on eating with delicate art." Self-published in 1825, Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste* comprises a joyous treatise on the "principles" (and pleasures) of gastronomy. (Unfortunately, Fisher's own translation of Brillat-Savarin is out of print.) A lawyer and the mayor of Belley at the time of the French Revolution, Brillat-Savarin combines lawyerly (but tongue-in-cheek) exposi-

tion, diplomatic discretion, and artistic discrimination, all wrapped in the warmth and humor of a generous extrovert at ease in his world and delighted by the life of the senses.

These principles are elaborated in a series of "Gastronomical Meditations." The sixty or so short essays address diverse topics, from an analysis of the senses to a discourse on the "Theory of Frying," presented as a lesson from the "Professor" to his cook. (The instruction must have been effective, because finally the Professor exclaims: "To you...fell the glory of offering to an astounded world a huge



fried turbot: that day was a day of gladness among the elect.") Eventually, Brillat-Savarin presents the great "science" of gastronomy is revealed as a religion with its own priestess, Gasterea, who loves best her altars found in that city that



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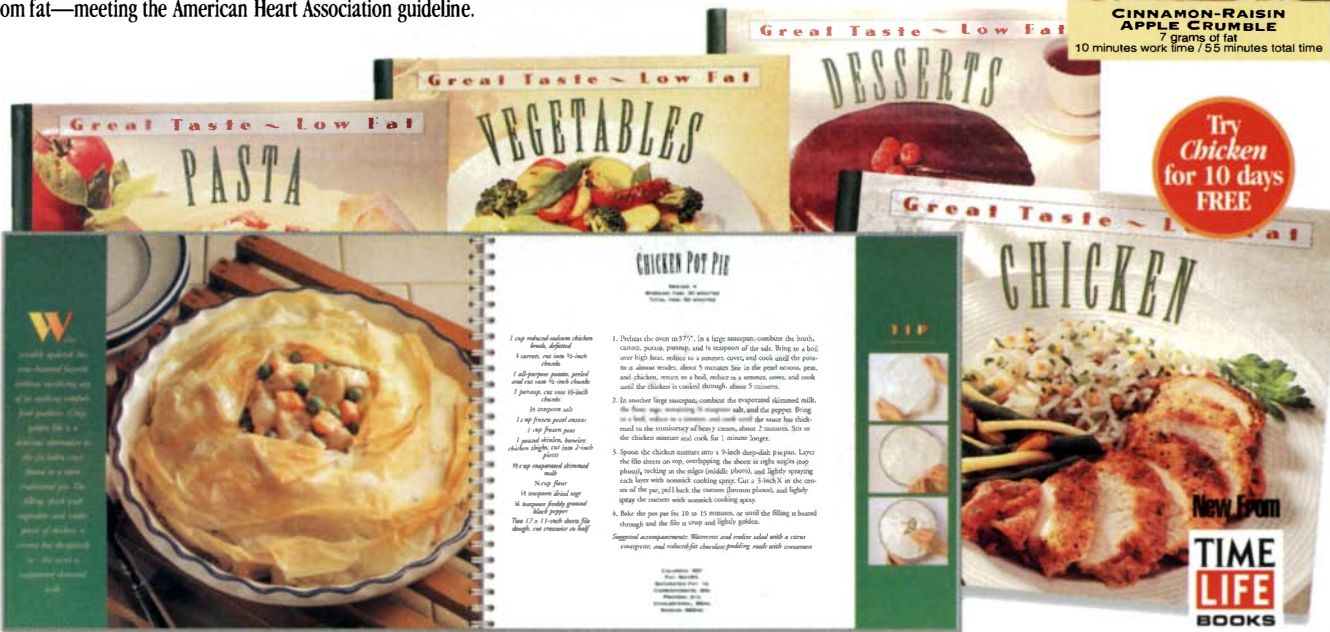
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surrounds the Seine.

A more specifically Parisian memoir is A. J. Liebling's *Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris*. In this book, along with digressions on boxing, rowing, sex, and a brief stint in the "para-Buchenwald" of a Swiss "slimming prison," Liebling recounts the "eater's apprenticeship" to which he applied himself during his years as a student at the Sorbonne. Out of this and later sojourns (in the late '20s and after WWII), Liebling, a journalist and a writer for *The New Yorker* at the time of the Algonquin Round Table, developed a palate and a philosophy of life.

He insists first of all that to be a good food writer, one must have a good appetite, and to have a good appetite, one must eat regularly and well. Worries about health will

ruin the appetite, a ruined appetite will offer insufficient exercise for the internal organs, and insufficiently exercised internal organs will prove, like retired athletes gone to seed, inadequate to meet the challenges of a comeback.

In evidence, Liebling presents the prodigious appetite of his friend Yves Mirande, who could "dazzle his juniors" by tucking away "a lunch of raw Bayonne ham and fresh figs, a hot sausage in crust, spindles of filleted pike in a rich rose *sauce Nantua*, a leg of lamb larded with anchovies, artichokes on a pedestal of foie gras, and four or five kinds of cheese, with a good bottle of Bordeaux and one of Champagne," all while discussing and ordering for the next day's meal. M. Mirande slowed down only when his favorite restaurateur retired,

and forced to eat at home, he lost his appetite...


Liebling laments the loss of great eaters, great restaurants, and Paris before the war. He believes, too, that with a little more gustatory stimulus than that cookie, Proust might have written a masterpiece.

For a greater focus on the activity cooking, consider Laurie Colwin's two books, *Home Cooking* and *More Home Cooking*, which collect her *Gourmet* columns and other writings from the 1980s. Ms. Colwin extols the virtues of ordinary food well prepared—home food, buttered noodles and gingerbread, for example.

Each article offers at least one recipe of the kind that busy people with jobs and children who still want to eat well can really use. She dis-


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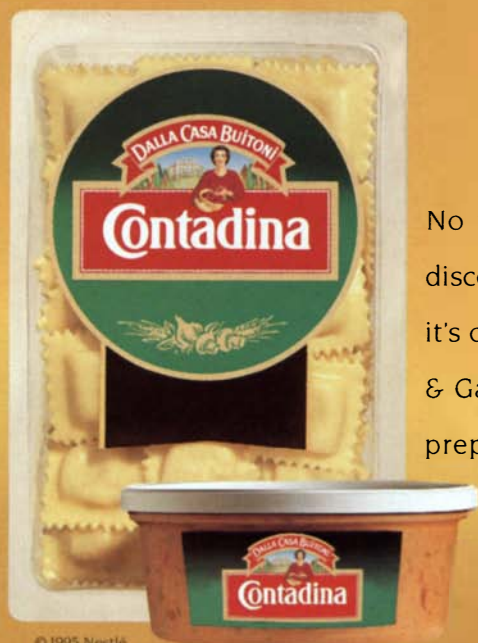


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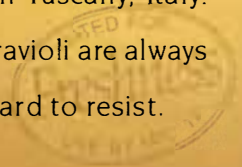
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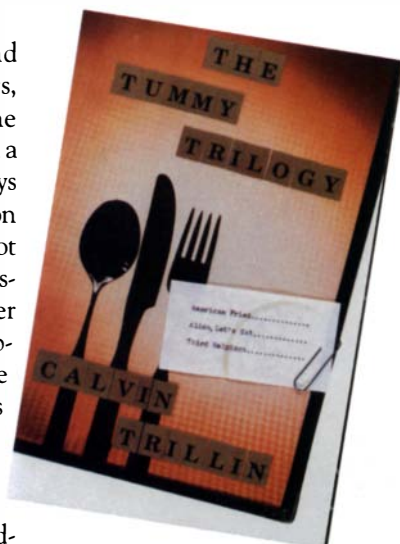
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people with allergies and homeless women in shelters, all of which can all be done well with a little thought and a minimum of fuss. I will always think of her as "the permission lady," granting permission not to truss a chicken, and permission not to attempt "lobster bisque made of pounded lobster shells" for a first-time guest. But I turn to Colwin as much to find out how she roasts a chicken as to absorb her feelings for these foods, the circumstances surrounding their preparation, and the emotional responses of the people who eat them.

*The Tummy Trilogy*, which brings together the collections *American Fried*, *Alice, Let's Eat*, and *Third Helpings*, reveals *New Yorker* essayist Calvin Trillin as a selfless scholar on an "endless search" for some-



thing decent to eat, a quest involving extensive field research and the courageous self-sacrifice of a true scientist, one who bravely experiments on himself.

Notwithstanding his tremendous effort, obstacles constantly impede Mr. Trillin's progress, what with the diffi-

culty of finding good barbecue in New York (requiring several restorative trips each year to Kansas City, home of Arthur Bryant's Barbecue—"THE SINGLE BEST RESTAURANT IN THE WORLD!"), the hopelessness of translating wall menus in Chinatown restaurants, and the whims of his wife, Alice, with her "weird predilection" for three meals a day.

Alice can cook *moules marinière*, but her husband sticks to what he knows: "I'm a specialist; I just eat." What he eats is everything, from the burned brisket edges at Arthur Bryant's to oyster loaves in Louisiana to Dungeness crabs on the Pacific coast. What he likes is "everything with everything": "Failing to add everything...demonstrates not the presence of restraint but the absence of curiosity."

## PUBLISHING INFORMATION

*The Art of Eating*, by M. F. K. Fisher. Collier Books, 1990. \$16, softcover; 744 pp. ISBN 0-2-032220-8

*The Physiology of Taste*, by Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. Penguin, 1994. \$12.95, softcover; 377 pp. ISBN 0-14-044614-1

*Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris*, by A. J. Liebling. North Point Press, 1986. \$11, softcover; 183 pp. ISBN 0-86547-236-X.

*Home Cooking*, by Laurie Colwin. HarperCollins, 1988, \$10, softcover; 184 pp. ISBN 0-06-097522-9; *More Home Cooking*, HarperCollins, 1993. \$22, hardcover; 213 pp. ISBN 0-06-016849-8

*The Tummy Trilogy*, by Calvin Trillin. Noonday Press, 1994. \$12, softcover; 386 pp. ISBN 0-374-52417-3.

Lisa Ornest is a "selfless scholar" who's on an endless search for the best smoked fish in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. ♦

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*Photography by George Lange*



# The Citrusy Subtlety of Lemongrass

This Southeast Asian herb is delicate, aromatic, and not quite lemony

BY ALEXANDRA GREELEY

Anyone who has ever enjoyed Southeast Asian cuisine has likely detected a subtle citrus flavor, an intriguing perfume that's lemony, but not tart, with a slight gingery undertone and an indefinable piquancy. The flavor is lemongrass, a basic ingredient in the cuisines of Southeast Asia. Commonly added to curries and used to infuse noodle dishes and soups, its subtle flavor pairs well with pork, seafood, and chicken. In the United States, lemongrass is often on the menus of chefs who offer "fusion" cuisine.

Lemongrass looks something like a pale, slender leek with a pinkish-cream-colored flattened bulb and long, pale green to green tops. Despite its name, lemongrass has just a shadow of a lemon's flavor. While you might think that a regular lemon, or at least its zest, would make an acceptable substitute for lemongrass, in fact the "lemon-ness" of the two ingredients is not at all similar. The taste of

the herb is more subtle than that of the fruit. Lemon has an assertive, astringent flavor that is lacking in lemongrass, which has a more delicate, almost floral taste.

First-time users often find this unyielding grass a bit puzzling. The tough stalks don't slice easily and no matter how long you simmer them, they never really soften. Lemongrass isn't actually eaten unless it's crushed to a paste or finely chopped. In fact, any large pieces should be removed after their flavor has been infused into a dish.

**The key is crushing the stalks to release their aromatic oils.** Cooks from different regions of Asia handle lemongrass in different ways. I once watched a Burmese friend peel off the fibrous outer leaves and the leafy ends, knot them loosely together, and toss them into a stockpot. A Laotian friend slices stalks the way people used to sharpen wooden pencils, by whittling off the ends with a knife; these shavings are easier to pound into a paste. In Malaysia, I saw a cook whack the plump whitish ends of lemongrass with a blunt object to release the fragrant oils before she sliced the stalks into thin rounds. Despite their different methods, each of these cooks seeks to maximize the subtleties of lemongrass by lightly bruising

or crushing the stalks to release their aromatic oils.

The whole stalk (minus the tough root portion but including the leafy ends) can be used. Slit it lengthwise down the center, or cut the stalk's 4- to 6-inch white part into slices, chunks, or slivers and use as is or pounded into a paste.

**Hard stalks indicate freshness.** When you shop for lemongrass, leave behind any stalks that look obviously old or have inner leaf folds with brown age spots. Lemongrass keeps well in the refrigerator wrapped in plastic or foil, and it seems to last indefinitely in the freezer.

Lemongrass is available dried as well as fresh, in powdered form or as dried shavings. I've never used either, but my Cambodian grocer claims that they have much less flavor than fresh. You can add powdered lemongrass directly to other ingredients, while the shavings must first be reconstituted in warm water.

Until recently, lemongrass was available only in Asian markets, but with the growing interest in Southeast Asian foods, it's showing up in the produce department of some grocery stores as well.

Alexandra Greeley, a food writer and editor, is the author of *Asian Grills* (Doubleday, 1993). ♦

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Lemongrass shown as a whole plant, a trimmed stalk, and slices.



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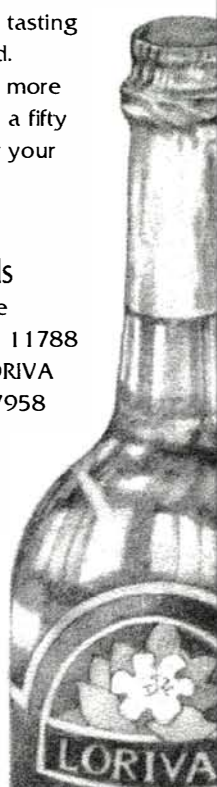
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## ALABAMA

**National Shrimp Festival**—October 12–15, Public Beach Area, Highway 59 South, Gulf Shores. Alabama's largest and most popular shrimp festival. Call 334/968-7511.

**National Peanut Festival & Fair**—November 3–11, Houston County Farm Center, Dothan. This annual event draws over 126,000 attendees and honors the peanut and all agri-business in the Wiregrass area. Call 334/793-4323.

## ARIZONA



**9th Annual La Fiesta de los Chiles**—October 21–22, Tucson Botanical Gardens. A celebration of the chile pepper and its honored place in our foods, gardens, arts, crafts, and folklore. International chile cuisines will be featured—both piquant and mild—representing Sonoran, Native American, Malaysian, Mexican, Middle Eastern, Guatemalan, Creole, and the spicy cuisines of other cultures. Southwestern music such as mariachi, waila, norteno, salsa, fiddle, folk, and Latin jazz will enliven the event. Local artisans will show their chile crafts and chile stringing demonstrations. The Botanical Gardens will feature several varieties of unusual edible and ornamental chile plants. Call 602/326-9686.

## ARKANSAS

**19th Annual Arkansas Rice Festival**—October 14–15, Weiner. Rice history, rice cooking contest, old-fashioned rice threshing. Call 501/684-2284.

## CALIFORNIA

**Mediterranean in America: Traditional Foods and Cooking of Italy**—October 17–20, Los Angeles. In this international symposium, sponsored by Oldways Preservation & Exchange Trust, leading Italian chefs will conduct Master Classes in traditional Italian regional cuisines, using the best of Italian foods and wine. Call 617/621-3000.

**1995 International Conference on the Diets of Asia**—November 28 through December 6, San Francisco. Diets of Asia as cultural models for healthy eating. Sponsored by Oldways Preservation & Exchange Trust. Call 617/621-3000.

## CONNECTICUT

**Mystic Seaport's Annual Chowderfest**—October 7–9, Mystic. The museum's tall ships, historic buildings, and 17 acres of scenic waterfront are the backdrop as local community groups vie for the honor of the most popular style of chowder. Call 203/572-5315.

## FLORIDA

**19th Annual Boggy Bayou Mullet Festival**—October 13–16, Niceville. Call 904/678-1615.

**Stone Crab & Seafood Festival**—October 19–22, The Colony Beach & Tennis Resort, Longboat Key. Presented by six of the nation's most renowned chefs and winemakers, the event features culinary demonstrations, wine tastings, a dinner featuring signature seafood dishes prepared by each chef and paired with selected wines, and a five-course dinner representing a team effort of all the chefs and vintners. Call 813/383-6464.

**Regional Conference, International Assoc. of Culinary Professionals**—October 27–28, Johnson & Wales University, Miami. "Professional Culinary Training and Education." To gain a greater understanding of the chef of the '90s, attendees will experience a full day of professional cooking classes, a tour and luncheon aboard a luxury cruise liner, a chef's showcase of chefs and students, and a chef's showcase of notable area restaurants. Call 502/581-9786.

## HAWAII

**Kona Coffee Cultural Festival**—October 14 through November 11, Kailua-Kona. Call 808/326-7820.

## ILLINOIS

**Burgoo Festival**—October 8, Utica. Featuring old-fashioned pioneer stew simmered for 15 hours in four 55-gallon kettles. Call 815/667-4861.

**Midwest International Wine Exposition**—October 20–22, Bismarck Palace & Hotel, Chicago. Seminars, a dinner, luncheons, and grand tastings featuring world-renowned wine authorities, vintners, chefs, sommeliers, and authors. Call 708/678-0071.

## IOWA

**Pumpkinfest**—October 7, Anamosa. The World Confederation Weigh-Off is held here, along with a pumpkin recipe contest. Call 319/462-4879.

## LOUISIANA

**Gumbo Festival**—October 13–15, Bridge City. Call 504/436-4712.

## MARYLAND

**St. Mary's County Oyster Festival**—October 21–22, County Fairgrounds, Leonardtown. Call 301/863-5015.

## MASSACHUSETTS

**Traditional Diets as Models for Healthy Eating**—October 22–26, Cambridge. An international conference, sponsored by Oldways Preservation & Exchange Trust, that explores building blocks of healthy diets and links between poor diets and chronic diseases. Call 617/621-3000.

## MICHIGAN

**Chef's Triathlon**—November 24–26, Chanty Creek Resort, Bellaire. Combines tableside cooking, ice carving, and slalom ski racing. Call 312/663-5701.

## NORTH CAROLINA

**12th Annual Barbecue Festival**—October 28, Lexington. Call 704/956-2952.

## OHIO

**89th Annual Circleville Pumpkin Show**—October 18–21, Circleville. Featuring pumpkin cooking contests and the world's largest pumpkin pie. Call 614/474-7000.

## RHODE ISLAND

**7th Annual Taste of Rhode Island**—September 30 and October 1, Newport. Cuisine from 40 of Rhode Island's best restaurants and caterers, plus culinary demonstrations by celebrity chefs, a Waiter's Obstacle Course, and a Parade of Chefs. Call 401/846-1600.

**3rd Annual Oktoberfest**—October 6–8, Newport. Featuring traditional German music and dance, a German food marketplace, and a Biergarten and Weingarten. Call 401/846-1600.

## SOUTH CAROLINA

**Fairfield County Bar-B-Que Cook-Off**—October 6–7, Fortune Springs Park, Winnsboro. Call 803/635-5548.

**Collard Festival**—October 20–21, Gaston. Local grower donates 40 crates of collards for the festival. It's served with ham, black-eyed peas, candied yams, and corn bread. Call 803/796-7725.

**Apple Harvest Festival**—October 21, Windy Hill Orchard Cider Mill, York. Cider making, pumpkin picking, and old-fashioned corn grinding. Call 803/684-0690.

## TEXAS

**Rice Epicurean Markets' Wine & Food Festival**—September 1 to mid-October, Houston. A celebration of Italy with cooking demonstrations by well-known Italian chefs from around the country, vintner dinners, a pasta competition with local chefs, and food tastings. Call 713/840-8406.

**6th Annual Conroe Cajun Catfish Festival**—October 13–15, Conroe. Featuring hot, spicy Cajun food, such as boudin, crawfish étouffée, gumbo, and catfish. Call 800/324-2604.

**International Championship Chili Cookoff**—November 3–4, Arturo White's Store, Terlingua. Qualifying chili cooks from around the country are invited to participate in the cookoff and chili showmanship event held in the desert at the foot of the Chisos Mountains. Call 903/874-5601.

## VIRGINIA

**23rd Annual Oyster Festival**—October 7, Maddox Family Campground, Chincoteague. Call 804/336-6161.

**22nd Annual Apple Butter Festival**—October 7–8, Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. Call 304/258-3738.

**Urbanna Oyster Festival**—November 3–4, Urbanna. Call 804/758-0368.



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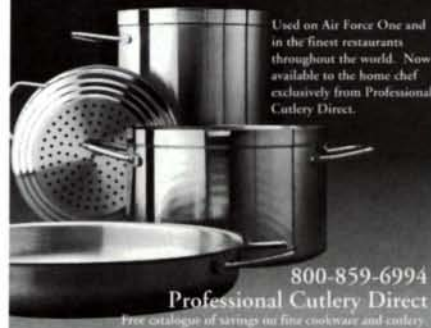
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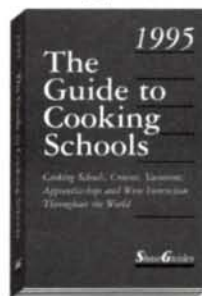
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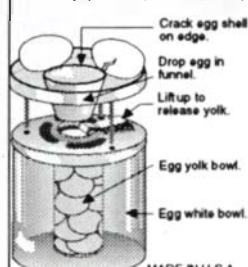
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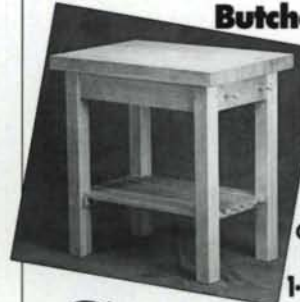
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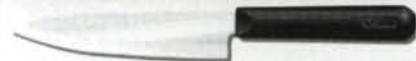


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### TOOLS

Dishware, at restaurant-  
supply stores 69–70  
Kitchenware, at restaurant-  
supply stores 69–71  
Oak barrels for making  
vinegar 66–67  
Strainers for deep-frying  
edible baskets 72  
Woks for deep-frying 72

# NUTRITION INFORMATION

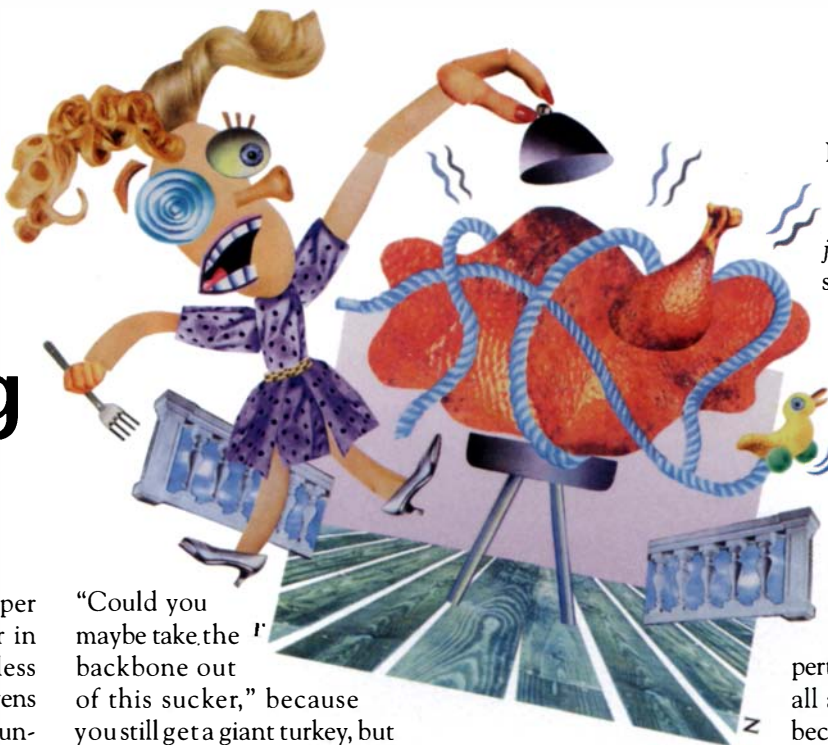
Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Ginger-Citrus Chicken	32	390	51%	35	14	22	2	12	6	95	350	1	
Curry-Yogurt Chicken	32	230	24%	37	6	6	2	2	1	100	650	1	
Southwestern Chicken in Parchment	33	490	38%	49	28	21	7	10	2	105	780	9	
Jamaican Spice Chicken	33	290	45%	35	4	14	3	9	2	95	490	1	
Three-Pepper Chicken	33	280	45%	35	2	14	3	9	2	95	620	1	
Cornmeal-Nut Chicken	33	570	45%	44	35	28	4	15	7	150	680	5	
Parmesan-Breadcrumb Chicken	33	390	39%	47	9	17	7	7	2	115	1370	1	
Gorgonzola-Stuffed Roulades	34	750	54%	45	25	53	17	21	13	150	940	4	
Chicken & Sweet Pepper Stew	34	440	48%	39	17	23	8	11	3	110	970	3	
Wild Rice & Smoked Chicken Chowder	37	220	25%	10	33	6	3	2	1	20	610	5	
Braised Celery with Tomato & Pancetta	40	250	26%	14	33	7	1	4	1	15	1180	14	
Tubettini with Celery Sauce	40	440	28%	12	67	14	2	10	2	0	490	6	
Celery & Potato Purée	41	340	46%	6	42	18	11	5	1	55	410	6	
Two-Celery Soup	41	110	42%	5	11	5.0	1.5	3.0	0.5	5	270	2	per cup
Radicchio, Endive & Grapefruit Salad	45	150	76%	4	7	13	3	3	6	5	220	1	
Braised Veal Shanks	46	600	44%	66	12	29	9	15	2	250	560	3	
Acini di Pepe Pasta with Zucchini	46	210	36%	6	27	8	2	5	1	5	240	2	
Oven-Dried Tomatoes	47	15	78%	0	1	1.0	0	1.0	0	0	40	0	per tomato
Sautéed Red Swiss Chard	47	110	71%	3	6	8	4	3	1	10	460	2	
Orange-Scented English Scones	50	230	47%	4	28	12	7	4	1	30	270	1	
Mushroom & Spinach Strudel	59	350	44%	11	43	17	8	7	2	60	650	7	
Cranberry Strudel	59	580	42%	9	81	27	8	12	6	55	270	14	
Apple Strudel	59	420	46%	7	52	22	11	6	3	75	280	3	
Sautéed Fresh Porcini	63	300	92%	3	6	30	6	21	3	10	270	1	
Halibut al Tabaccaio	63	330	62%	25	3	23	3	14	5	45	630	1	
Porcini Oil	64	90	98%	0	0	9	1	7	1	0	20	0	per tablespoon
Saffron Risotto with Dried Porcini	64	330	29%	10	44	11	6	3	1	30	520	1	
Classic Marsala Sabayon	76	110	41%	3	13	5	2	2	1	210	10	0	
Chilled Champagne Sabayon	76	220	66%	3	14	16	8	5	1	250	20	0	
Chilled Lemon Sabayon	76	300	66%	5	22	22	12	7	1	260	160	0	
Chilled Blueberry Sauce	77	70	0%	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	
Shortbread Cookies	77	170	62%	2	15	12	7	3	0	30	35	1	per cookie
Baked Chocolate Sabayon	77	240	46%	8	26	12	5	4	1	270	60	0	

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.



# Turkey, Turkey, Burning Bright



**T**rying to cook a proper Thanksgiving dinner in England is no picnic, unless you're used to very small ovens that don't hold big turkeys unless you chop off their stick-out legs and hammer the stick-out handles on your American roasting pan to death. So I decided that barbecuing the turkey would be the perfect way to cook Thanksgiving dinner for my London circle of friends. Silly me.

Inviting too many people to too small a house (mine) and having the barbecue two flights up on a roof terrace is a problem right off. So I called Carol. Huge house. Nice china and crystal. Regulation covered-kettle barbecue. Then I find out that London isn't exactly overflowing with charcoal this time of year. Carol and I moped around baking pumpkin everything, living for news like, "I can get half a bag from a mother at school—she says it's a little damp, though."

By Thanksgiving morning I was in a real sweat. Counting briquettes the night before had triggered a nagging, unsettling scenario: what does one do if a 28-pound turkey turns out to be bigger than the barbecue?

Here's what not to do: race to the butcher's and say,

"Could you maybe take the backbone out of this sucker," because you still get a giant turkey, but now this spread-eagled number drapes down over all four sides of the butcher block and looks like a road accident.

Meanwhile, over at Carol's, her husband, Barbecue Bill, was busy freezing on the balcony fanning coals with a hair dryer while Carol—in a real stew, too, trying to find her hair dryer and now referring to herself as "Lucky" Carol—was juggling Bourbon Squash Rings and a hundred pounds of Chesapeake Bay Retriever, whose mission in life is to rid countertops of raw turkey. Which by the way I am having a pretty sensational time stuffing, seeing as there is now no cavity in which to stuff the stuffing. Plus, there's

no thread strong enough to sew it up. Plus, we have to cut the cords off the children's pull-duck toys and wind them round the turkey mummy-fashion until it looks like a macramé boat bumper. Then we lug this really stunning

entrée over to the grill, sling it on, and finally get to see the lid perch on the turkey like some tiny black bowler hat.

When you're tired of standing around not smiling at the problem, what you do is smash the lid down by twisting some wire hangers around it. This is not totally agreeable to undo every ten minutes when it's time to add a briquette, nor when overcome with the desire to take one more little

**The barbecue lid perched on the turkey like some tiny black bowler hat**

peek because you've never seen so much smoke in your life and it's all snaking into the house and making Lucky Carol's festively laid table invisible. Guests are due any second, kids are killing each other, and

there she is having to scramble around in the attic looking for fans. And I swear, if I hadn't had to drive into town for autumnal-shaped salt cellars and fake leaves from France on which to serve cheese, I would have helped.

Now listen to this surprise cheery note: English guests come bearing major hostess gifts, so make sure you get the door. Someone must have told them this was traditional or something. And are they ever excited by the idea of a whole turkey out sizzling on the barbecue—the Brits being especially awestruck since barbecuing isn't really their forte and they consider us Yanks the experts—and they want to hear all about it, which is too bad because I'm a little busy tending hanger burns and taking meat-thermometer readings by flashlight and getting pneumonia and figuring we'll all be eating sometime around Christmas.

And then suddenly we need a fire extinguisher and a couple of antique platters bite the dust and the turkey tastes like it spent a few years in Vesuvius and the guests are wondering what exactly we're all supposed to be giving thanks for today, outside of maybe not having the house burn down with us in it. Barbecue Bill looks like he thinks it's all my fault. And later on, on my way out the door with a lot of leftovers, Lucky Carol isn't saying anything like, "We must do this again next year." I hear they might move back to the States. Talk about touchy.

Now, next year: supposedly, there's a way to steam fish in your dishwasher and to do a pot roast on the engine of your car. Why couldn't this work with turkey? Say on someone else's car? I'll call Denise.

—Astrid Ronning  
London, England ♦

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# A Sea of Cranberries

The cranberry harvest that takes place across America every October is a watery event. Bogs are flooded to make the berries float for easier harvesting. Workers wade in hip-high water to corral the scarlet fruit.

